

# Through Algeria & Tunisia

Lady Warren



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Through Algeria  
and Tunisia



Through  
Algeria & Tunisia  
on a Motor-bicycle *by*  
Lady Warren



Jonathan Cape

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# Summary

Dunlop  $2\frac{1}{2} \times 26$  in. tyres.

4 H.P. Belt-driven, 1918 "Renovated" Triumph, with light Dunhill side-car.

Weight of machine, 310 lbs. Weight of passengers, 260 lbs. }  
Carried 2 suitcases, 3 galls. petrol,  $\frac{1}{2}$  gall. oil, spare tyres and } Total weight  
and parts } about 630 lb.

Total Mileage, 1707 miles (1,589 miles with side-car) } Average miles per  
Total Petrol consumed,  $27\frac{1}{4}$  galls. } gallon 62.7.

Total hours travelling,  $104\frac{3}{4}$  }  
Total hours on road,  $87\frac{3}{4}$  } Average speed 19 m.p.h.

Average miles per day, 99. Average hours travelling per day,  $6\frac{1}{4}$ .

*Mishaps.*—6 punctures, 1 broken belt-fastener, 3 leaves broken of side-car springs, countless broken spokes. Very inferior lubricating oil.

## Chapter I

## Introductory

WHEN the wandering spirit stirs him, lucky is he who can yield to the lure. There are probably few people, to whom travelling is even remotely possible, who have not felt the longing to feel and see the romance unfolded by travellers' tales. To all such this book is written. It is not food for the *habitué* of Algiers and Tunis: it is food for the babes and sucklings among travellers who will not be *blasés* at my naïve discoveries and enthusiasms over things that the *habitué* knows too well; sometimes too well to move from the comforts and gaiety of Algiers and Tunis, with their hotels and shops. Still more it is not food for the explorer and serious historian or scientist. Still less is our excursion to be looked on in the light of an adventure threatened with brigands and wild beasts. Seeing that the roads of North Africa have motor services in many parts, and in all parts motors pass every day, and that one motor company have their cars driven by girls who have to return, after taking a party, alone, sometimes over 300 or 400 miles, it is not to be expected that anyone who knows would believe yarns of brigands and excitements of that kind. At the same time this winter (1921) there were some daring "hold-ups." One public motor was held up and every one made to get down and disgorge their treasures and money; this was between

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Algiers and Bousaada. Also a train was stopped and robbed not very long ago; so these incidents give one every excuse for carrying a revolver. On the whole, except the risk after dark of the ordinary robbers and rascals common to the lonely parts of most countries, it is safe. It is possible that these brigands and robbers one hears of have been driven to other and honest pursuits, for, according to Mr. Punch, "the brigands of North Africa have complained that the roads are full of journalists!" We met and heard of several of these latter, which gives substance to the idea. Some of the French officials seem to think that parts of the southern roads of Tunis are dangerous. In fact one police officer, talking of the road to Le Kef and Sousse in Tunis, said quite seriously that while he admired courage, it could not avail, for if robbers should appear "*ils couperaient la gorge comme un mouton.*" I have since had my doubts that this charming young man was either trying to fill us with thrills over what habitude had made dull for himself, or that he was of a nervous disposition. Be it as it may, although we followed no itinerary and stayed in village inns, broke down in lonely roads, and conversed with every one who could talk and understand French, except when we lost our camp on the desert we had no frights and alarms and our apprehension proved groundless.

When finally the would-be traveller finds his dream about to materialize, "where to go" torments him. Each idea he meets with as to mode of travelling and the country which appeals to him seems to be the "one and only." We went through this phase, but limited to North Africa. Inquiry resulted in so many routes and

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itineraries whose promoters longed to take us by the hand, and purse, that we were bewildered. We all but decided to go from Bordeaux to Casablanca by a boat whose very name tickled our sense of humour, stark as it was with the holiday spirit, the *Figuig*, and from there to Oran by public car, char-à-banc, or by private car, with camping from Fez to Oran, where the railway is not completed. Then to go from Oran to Algiers. This sounded thrilling at first, till one realized that it meant being tied to one's conductor, the transatlantic company who have flooded the route with tourists. Even with our own car we should be forced to stay in the company's camps. So although Fez and Mekinez are perhaps even more wonderful than the towns of Algeria and Tunisia, and in a way less often seen, we decided to make for Algiers with no definite plan and see what should happen. Since then, of course, the disturbances in Morocco have altered the possibilities. We got a great deal of advice; some useful, some otherwise. We suffered from the usual ignorance of other countries. Finally we realized that if we were to hear lions roaring in the desert we must take our own; if we wanted music as entirely super-oriental as our ear had been accustomed to at Drury Lane, a gramophone and records of "The Garden of Allah" music were absolutely essential. When some one finally said, "There is no sand on the desert," and added a cart-load to our hypothetical luggage, it was too much. The more we examined the idea of Algiers as a starting-point, the more it pleased us; and the more we heard about routes and itineraries, the more determined we were to be independent.

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When the idea of the motor-bike and side-car was first mooted my spirit shrank within me—me, who had only once or twice, with blanched face and turned-up toes and bated breath, been threaded through traffic and whizzed round corners at what felt like the peril of my life, in a side-car ! Said I : “ P., you’ll terrify me, you’ll go more than five miles an hour, you will take me down circular roads on mountains.” “ No,” and by all his gods he swore that he would do none of these things. In honeyed tones he said : “ We can just do little runs here and there from Algiers and other towns where we will be staying.”

So we hied us to London Town and got passports, to the A.A., for Triptyches,<sup>1</sup> by which you can guarantee the duty of your car or cycle in each country you take it to without actually having to put the money down and the ensuing correspondence, waxing acrimonious for several years, to recover the same on your return. Then also we insured the bus. We bought a hood for the side-car to keep the sun off my delicate person ; goggles for dust and glare, and a mica wind screen. We bought so many spare parts that Johnson remarked that “ if the worst comes to the worst P. can construct an entirely new motor-bike.”

Some people said, “ You will be wrapped in sunshine.” Does not also Mr. Thomas Cook’s little book, *Sunny Nooks*, with ultra-super-cerulean sea and an Arab bathed in sunshine on the cover, prove that it is so ? On the other hand, one heard of rain and even snow. So as Mark Twain, when stricken unto death with a cold in the head, took all the remedies suggested by his many friends, we took everything we were advised to do, except the lion

<sup>1</sup> This rule has been altered this year.—*Author*.



# Introductory

and gramophone, with the result that our departure looked like the exodus of a large family fleeing from over-taxation.

It seemed so absurd to have fifteen boxes, bags, hold-alls, and bundles, but there it was. Inside a large railway bus, loaded to the sky, I made progress through London on the early morning of February 15.

We soon found ourselves on the *China*, bound for Marseilles, the "bus" in the hold, the baggage disposed of; and the holiday feeling fully developed.

As the magician of the fairy tales, I will now take you as on a wishing carpet straight to Algiers, with a peep at Marseilles, at the Customs officials, and the little red and white painted toy boat, the *Timgad*, from the clouds as you sit in state—see that poster of Treloar's carpets. To convey the "bus" from the dock we arrived at in Marseilles, to the dock from which the *Timgad* started, through the fog of suspicion and distrust which the sight of a traveller with a motor-driven vehicle produces in and from the French Customs officer, was an arduous and lengthy business. However, this was even finally arranged, and the somewhat portly gentleman in blue was firmly squeezed into the side-car and whizzed, shaking like a jelly, over the tram lines and through the appalling dock traffic, to the dock where the *Timgad* was berthed.

As he was pulled out, much as the cork of a pickle bottle is slowly removed, he remarked, "It is your *mother* who goes with you in this affair? Votre mère est très mince, n'est-ce pas?" He himself was the tub shape of the average middle-aged Frenchman in authority.

The *Timgad* is a gay little red and white ship. I had

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to rub my eyes and conjure up Messrs. Bassett Lowkes' window and wonder if we had bought her to sail on the Round Pond.

Inside she is the same, painting, carpets, upholstery all dainty and toy-like.

We hunted for my cabin and found it excessively toy-like. Next we looked for P.'s cabin. Investigation revealed the fact that we were supposed to share mine, which had two berths. We had booked very late, so the smallness of the cabin was to be expected, but hardly that we should share it. There were beautiful cabins on the upper decks, and young Watson, with the truest generosity, offered P. the second berth in his. And so, after thirty-six hours of a perfect sea, we saw Alger, the "El djeraz" of the time of the Moors and Corsairs, whose wonderful bay has witnessed battles, peaceful trading and pirates' bloody work, through the last twenty-three centuries at all events.

Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Spaniards, French, all in turn have invaded and conquered this town and its predecessors on the site.

It is not difficult to imagine reasons for conquest and annexation.

As you see it from the sea far away it looks like a city of the Arabian Nights, set on terraces on the high spur of hills which bounds the bay. From the town the bay sweeps in a huge curve to the east, where the Djurdjura mountains press their snow-capped heads against the sky and sweep down to the flat coast in lines of blue and fire. It was afternoon on a winter day, the sun thinking of setting, the sky blue at the zenith and silvery gold on the horizon east as well as west.

## Introductory

As we drew nearer, the town itself lost all its magic qualities and revealed an ugly sameness of barrack-like flat-topped modern French-built hotels and houses, unmitigated by trees or gardens, till one's eyes travelled round to where the town climbs the hill, and loses itself in the trees and gardens of the suburb of Mustapha, where is perched the Hotel St. George in a pleasing garden.

As the sun got lower the south-eastern landscape glowed softly in its long rays, and when I arrived in my rooms at the St. George, with windows overlooking the bay and the town out of sight, the last gold light was fighting the shadows of the mountains to the beach, where the sea, blue as indigo, threw splashes of white foam on the yellow sand.

Being Sunday, no luggage except light articles could be delivered till next day, and the "bus" had to be left on the *Timgad* too.

After dinner we walked a bit in the garden and heard some very excellent classical music by the hotel orchestra, who apparently, as a relief from Fox-trot, Tango and Spanish Schottische, extracted from them at all times, give a sort of recital of operatic orchestral music for an hour after dinner, and very delightfully they do it.

Having thus arrived at the Chosen City, we decided to stay for a few days and do some trips into the neighbourhood before starting on our real travels. For I must mention that on board the *China*, with maps and books, we had worked out a sort of itinerary of our own, by following which and travelling twenty-four hours per day we should see Algeria, the Sahara, Constantine, Tunisia,

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Sicily, and finish up with a little run up the coast of Italy, all in five weeks ! It was a splendid idea, but alas ! a motor-bike is not a wishing carpet, and no genii attended the rubbing of our lamps !

## Chapter 2

## The Start

**A**FTER a frenzied and successful effort to get all we needed into and on our little "bus" and yet leave room for me, we were ready for the road at nine.

On the luggage carrier were two suit-cases of respectable size. These looked mountainous and appeared to be perilously balanced on the carrier, to which they were bound with two good straps and a piece of rope; but it proved absolutely secure. In the side-car, which, as before mentioned, is very small, went manifold loose things, books, cameras, field-glasses, sketching materials, fur coats, overcoat, dust-coats, mackintoshes, and lastly myself. Later we found it necessary to carry a *bidon* of petrol as well! Still there was room, and it is really very comfortable. In the cavity behind the back of the seat we carried kettle and spirit stove, biscuits and chocolate and tea.

Some one clicked a camera at us and, "puff puff," we were off. We shot round the curve on to the steep tram swept *pavé* at about one hundred and fifty miles an hour!

I know I presented that look of patient suffering observable on the countenances of all occupants of side-cars over twenty years of age!

That uneasy air is born of the knowledge that the usual

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child who drives the cycle has an atrophied speed sense and the conviction that no matter what emergency may arise exit is impossible.

The little door like the eye of a needle, the little apron, the little wind screen button him in inextricably.

In the right-hand traffic, too, it seems a ticklish business, with one's toes and legs in the coffin-like cavity ; one feels that a blow from a little thing like a tram, a lorry, or even a five-horse dray, would snap it off, legs and all.

It was this first day as we whizzed through miles of tram *pavé* that I had visions of various tragic endings to our beginning. If we were to have a smash, our unconscious forms would lie from nightfall to dawn, getting flatter as successive lorries should iron us out.

The road out of Algiers is very tiresome—trams, teams of horses, lorries, cattle, goats, and the slippery *pavé* broken into deep holes make progress very slow. My notes of the day are like the writings of an imbecile with a split stick. However, after bumping and swerving through a maze of bazaars, docks and the mixed traffic, we emerged on to a fair road, cheered by a sign-post saying "Tizi Ouzou."

It was a wonderful day of bright sunlight and cloudy sky. We passed through varied scenery. This is the ordinary road to Fort National, and is fairly busy with motor-cars carrying sightseers on the four days' tour to Biskra.

The colouring was extraordinary. Hills in the distance. The foreground wooded, and with great spaces of vivid magenta pink and bright gold flowers.

At first the constant variety of scenery is amazing. This first day my notes run :





THE START.





## The Start

"Scenery confusing in variety. Like Dorset. Like Algiers, like everywhere."

The road is fairly straight, and in the 107 kilometres rises 150 metres and falls to 80 metres, to rise and fall again till it rises at Tizi Ouzou on to the height of 200 metres. Part of the way it goes over bare rolling down-like hills. The high mountains in the distance and some little brown trees, with jewel-green shoots of earliest spring, make another of the harmonies of colour which are so enchanting.

We arrived at Tizi Ouzou on market day, about half-past eleven, and halted for lunch.

The villages in this part of Algeria are, for the most part, entirely French; *pavé* roads, Mairie, Hôtel de Ville, little quaint ugly churches with pointed steeples, a row of shops with French names and designations.

The market-place is sometimes in the middle; but more often outside the town, for, with few exceptions, the Arab quarter is quite separate from the modern French quarter. In many cases the old Arab town is as it was found by the French, who have built their own town adjoining it. The market-place is usually in or near the Arab quarter.

We passed the market-place on the way in to the French town, the last ten kilometres having been blocked constantly by herds of casually herded sheep who literally flow over the road, and if this flood is successfully turned off it is certain to surge back on you as you try to pass. I had visions of a sheep or "sheeps" caught up by my pointed end as a cow by a cow-catcher and flung upon my lap a baa-ing, ruined mass.

The French town is like all the rest. Large and

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straggling, with a main street execrably *pavé* and a line of little trees on either side.

Through the open door were glimpses of women going about their household tasks, of children playing.

Small gardens with few flowers, cackling hens and geese clamouring in the streets. The streets of these towns are without exception exceedingly clean and wide.

Seeing that experience of domestic arrangements proves complete absence of baths and the most primitive sanitary arrangements, the apparent cleanliness of the greater part of the inhabitants and the purity of the clear fresh air seem miraculous.

The impression of leisure and absence of any energy remains in my mind as a first impression, and in no part of our tour or in any place was it dispelled.

Spring was in its earliest blossoming, and this day was one of great beauty. The sky of an intense blue, with masses of white shaded clouds moving fast before the high wind. The little trees with warm red twigs, tipped with vivid green buds. The flat plain, carpeted with heather pink and chrome yellow, patched with jade green grass, swept to the feet of the sudden blue rocky hills.

Here and there as we neared the coast, from the heights we had glimpses of distant bays cutting deeply into the mountains which sweep blue and hard to the very edge of the almost tideless sea.

We passed queer little trees, whose flat branches are as platforms, upon each of which, presenting a most droll appearance, was a stork's nest, with Mamma sitting in it, and sometimes Papa standing by, looking too absurd. It reminded me irresistibly of Lear's rhyme of the man

## The Start

who perceived a bird in a bush. He, being questioned as to whether it were small—

Replied, "Not at all;  
It is three times as large as the bush."

Storks seem to be able to balance themselves, their homes and their families in the most precarious places. We saw one—yes, it *is* incredible—on the top of the weather-vane of a village church. It would, I thought, be interesting to have a little talk about storks with someone, so I tried. I expect I selected the village idiot as my victim. For beyond that they are *oiseaux*, that they build nests, and in the spring produce young, I got nothing out of the dirty-faced little French girl. A slight gleam of light rose in the pig-like eyes at the sight of a few sous.

We lunched at the Hôtel Lagarde—the usual excellent omelette preceded by *hors d'œuvres*—olives, radishes, and thin slices of sausage. This was followed by a queer stew which filled me with unappetizing suspicion. It haunted us, and I never learnt to like it in any of its disguises.

The wine of the country, even the "vin ordinaire," which is freely placed on the table, is most excellent.

After a leisurely lunch, in which our natural desire for a rest was exceeded by the extreme langour of the service, we "upped and offed" for Fort National, twenty-seven kilometres in distance from Tizi Ouzou and 1,100 metres (= 3,400 feet) in altitude.

This was our first experience of real mountain roads. Truly these are wonderful in grading and surface. At first the continual twisting and windings and the absence

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of *any* wall or stones at the side, which falls away precipitately, is rather terrifying to the firmly wedged-in occupant of the side-car. As we ascended, a panorama of great beauty opened below us. The hillside fell away very steeply, and we saw stretched below us the flower-carpeted plains we had traversed in the morning, while, as we neared the top of the spur, the snow-peaked Djurdjuras towered in front of us in the direction in which we intended to pass over the Col de Tirourda on the morrow. Owing to the openness of the valleys between Fort National and these hills they appear more than their height, which is something like 1,800 metres (= 5,550 feet). They are very craggy and bare, throwing into contrast the low hills between and the well-wooded range on which we were travelling.

This is the country of the Khabyles. The Khabyles are a people of very ancient origin. They are the original Berbers, said to be the descendants of Shem, the son of Noah.

The term Khabyle is derived from a word of similar pronunciation, and signifies, broadly, tribes.

Their history and genealogy can be traced back to the beginning of history. Their ancestors were those people who harboured the refugee, Queen Dido, and her soldiers, a thousand years before Christ. They are quite fair, the women are unveiled, their features regular, with large clear eyes and well-shaped faces. To the European idea their beauty is rather marred by their fashion of painting the cheeks dark carmine and tattooing cheeks and chin in varying degrees with indigo!

Some of the children are really lovely. Their clothes, women and children alike, are very picturesque: the

## The Start

conical draped head-dress, not unlike those seen in pictures of mediæval ladies, with bright silks and embroideries, being especially noticeable.

The dirty streets of the Arab quarter of Tizi Ouzou was full of the Khabyle vendors of fruit.

Extraordinary is the variation between them and the Arab. In spite of the mixtures of blood incidental to conquest and vicissitude, they are still distinct in type from the Arabs.

Sometimes you see hair quite reddish, and even light, with clear hazel eyes.

The Berbers' ancestry is so long that there have been many other races, conquerors for the most part, to whom they are indebted for some of their superficial variation ; but as far as can be known the essential type has persisted through it all, merely carrying with it the blood of Phœnician, Roman, Arab and Vandal (Teutonic), which shows in some instances in variation of colouring and build.

After leaving Tizi Ouzou, the road crosses the valley of a wide river and winds round a range of hills called, I think, the Mimoun. It is a French military road and leads to Fort National, which was built in 1857 : not that the French task of subduing this ancient race was by any means completed then. Up to the time of the French conquest, finally achieved with much bloodshed in 1871, the Khabyles had always succeeded through the ages in rising up through their conquerors, in each case assimilating their different qualities to a certain extent, and so have ever regained their independence. It looks now, however, as if, although they are unlikely ever to be docile subjects, their independence has really gone for good.



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Fort National and other similar places are a necessary menace to their enterprise and thwarted spirit.

Always ready to absorb new ideas, their history shows over and over again how by imitation of each advancing civilized example they surpassed their conquerors and reasserted themselves. Bougie at one time was a centre of knowledge, literature and science of paramount importance in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. After the conquest by Pedro Navarro, and his overthrow at their invitation by Barbarossa and other pirate leaders, who betrayed their allies and swore allegiance to the Turkish Empire, which by this time had practically ousted the Moorish Empire, the Berbers or Khabyles retired farther and farther into their mountains, from which they only emerged when the lust of battle or the hope of successful rebellion against the tyrant Turks tempted them.

It is said that the last leader of the Khabyle forlorn hope against the French, in 1871-2, was a brave man whom the French would have placated if possible. It is said that the Legion of Honour was conferred upon him, and that on his defeat and death the despised Order was found tied to the tail of his charger!

Olive, almond and fig trees clothe the sides of the deeply indented mountains. The Djurdjura hold their heads (snow-capped at the time of year we were there) high to the clouds, lesser ranges send spurs from the main mass on all sides. It is a riot of colour and contrast. Bleak craggy mountains, the forest-lined gorges, the prismatic carpet of flowers on the plain, the trees of bright early spring, budding, and the sombre ilex. All this unfolded to our enchanted vision as each bend of the

## The Start

road gave us a different vista. I must not forget the note of grey added to the rest by the olive gardens beneath whose shade and at the side of the roads grew little purple irises and tall asphodel. The picturesque Khabyale villages crown many of the lesser hills. I believe that the illusion of picturesqueness and even solidity can only be retained by keeping the enchantment lent by distance.

The Khabyales are nominally, and to a great extent virtually, Moslems. That is to say they hold the faith with certain differences and independence. Seeing that their religious influences have been as varied as their conquerors, this is scarcely remarkable.

The weather this day was perfect and our spirits rose as the day wore on, and barring one puncture we had no mishaps.

Little did we imagine, having plunged into this tour without any preparations and no information, that when we should descend the eastern slopes of these sunny beautiful mountains, we should presently find ourselves drowned with rain, frozen with snow and buffeted with wind. For Bougie and the surrounding country, even to Setif, has the highest rainfall and the most capricious weather in the North of Africa, 'tis said, and we found it so.

Fort National we reached about four, and having enjoyed the wonderful view, rather rashly decided at a quarter to five to do the remaining 20 kilometres to Michelet, about 300 feet higher in actual altitude; but as the road descends and rises again several times, it was a stiff climb and with but an hour or less of daylight and twilight, it was not really possible to do it before dark. The mountain air was so exhilarating and the day had

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been so beautiful that we could not resist the temptation to make the effort. Also we were very anxious to find out whether or no the Col de Tirourda, the pass over the Djurdjura, 5,400 feet above sea-level, and our only way to Biskra unless we retraced our steps nearly to Tizi Ouzou, was snowed up. So we started, and of course were benighted. I may as well here mention that our sanguine disposition led us on, practically every day we spent on the road, to over-estimation of the distance we could cover before dark. In three weeks' tour, and seventeen days' actual travelling, we did 1,800 miles, and, as I say, even if we started at eight (more often than not our early start was prevented by the garage people) we were nearly always feeling our way along an unknown road an hour after sunset !



## Chapter 3

### Fort National and Michelet

**W**E arrived at Michelet after dark. As a first experience of narrow, steep, unguarded roads, extremely winding and curly, the falling evening gave me that feeling of dead certainty about the brevity of life. I even fell to a sort of resignation to the point that the faster we went the sooner it would be over one way or another.

Up and up and round and round, as we got higher the turnings became sharper and more frequent. It is with something approaching paralysis that one speeds on while a few yards in front the road appears to end.

However, the old truism that the longest time must end did not fail us! A straggling village on the edge of a steep slope looking across to the snow-capped mountains, which we must cross to-morrow—this is Michelet.

The hotel was found with some difficulty owing to the crowd of boys and people, who, apparently springing from the earth on the narrow road, impeded our movements to the point of exasperation.

The Michelet hotel was our first stop after the comforts and splendour of the St. George. It is in proportion equally magnificent compared to some we were to find ourselves in later. But we were not yet to know that.

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The patron did not receive us with the cordiality which he would use to a traveller who rolls up to his hotel in a *car de luxe*.

No ; he was cold in manner to the dust-covered, shabby-looking auto-cyclists.

This hotel is of course known to every one who crosses the Col de Tirourda ; but as the first at which one stops it does deserve description.

After the preliminary hostilities had developed through armed neutrality to a realization that we should probably pay well in spite of our poverty-stricken appearance and the plebeian nature of our transport, we were shown to our rooms : clean stone cells, with fair beds and spartan furniture, but with open fireplaces. They seemed the *ultima* of discomfort and chilliness. The window opened (at least after a struggle it could be opened) on to the valley with the snow-topped Djurdjura like silver phantoms against the sky.

A giant Arab person of menial aspect conducted us to our rooms. "Where is the *femme de chambre* ?" said I. "I am *femme de chambre*," was the reply, with a sly smile.

He lit fires and got hot water, made the beds, and when we had made our toilets to the extent permitted by our slender luggage, we descended to find him waiting at table.

The hotel is, apparently, the meeting and dining place of all and sundry ; for persons of all the humbler social grades were eating heartily of strange-looking dishes and drinking the hard, sour, wholesome wine of the country, which goes free to every customer.

We had, apparently, by that time been quite accepted, and we felt rather as one imagines the Person of Quality

## Fort National and Michelet

to have felt in the old-time inns, with the best of everything set before him with the manner of hearty hospitality belonging to the host who sees a long purse. Partridges, omelette, some good wine, coffee and fair cognac, after this repast we felt at peace with all the world.

Then the Arab *bonne a toute faire* appeared mysteriously with an old rusty tin biscuit-box. From its murky recesses he produced jewellery, Khabyle jewellery. We selected some that took our fancy, and he named a price that may have its equal in diamonds and rubies and gold. Upon our display of indignant refusal, with the air of finality which testifies the born bluffer and extractor of the shekels of the tourist, he shut the tin box and departed with the hurt look that he must have found most valuable for years, so well done was it.

We, knowing that his eye and his ear were surely glued alternately to the hole where the latch went through the door, smoked with the air of the heathen who cared for none of these things. Presently, as we bent over our maps, he came in again, and hovering around us, let loose that oriental atmosphere of expectancy and compassion which is calculated to set one thinking of the possibilities of the offered bargain.

His arms hung loose, it was so obvious that he was no longer willing to offer his treasures to such ignorant, stingy people!

At last he could bear the silence no longer, we had beaten him at his own game. At least we thought so. I have not been so sure since. Anyway, after coy advances and retreats, I made him a firm offer of twice their proper price, which to him was nothing compared to the six

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times asked, and I know often received. To us twice was also a bargain compared to six times, and he eventually, with the air of one who, reluctantly succumbing to your charms, puts up with a loss rather than your favour should fall from him, accepted the offer.

But do not imagine that this consummation was attained at this, the second appearance.

Dear me! No! At intervals of half an hour that night, with our hot water in the glacial early morning, while I was standing barefoot on the cold stone floor, frustrated in my endeavour to reach and bolt the door in the unappreciable interval between his knock and his entry, again as we descended the stairs, and with our omelette. "Not again will you find the true Khabyte work offered like this. It is a great chance," and so on. Finally with the bill, almost with sobs, he laid them on my plate, and as I paid I knew that I had paid too much. They were extremely pretty and well worked. I do not regret it. One, a sort of plaque, such as you see in every shop, studded with and hung with corals, has a beautiful enamel pattern on its back.

We pushed our way through the dense crowd of people gathered to look at us as if we were visitors from Mars, at about nine o'clock. It was a wonderful morning. At the garage we asked for the road to the Col de Tirourda, to be told that it was impassable. I was in dread lest P. should try it.

I was in no mind to try and ride over frozen snow which was the alternative to soft drifts upon the verge of a precipitous pass 5,500 feet above the plain.

We were debating the adventure, but when we found that we should not get anyone to help us push the bus

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if we got stuck, even P. was unwillingly compelled to abandon the idea.

So off we went down the road, steep and zigzag like a mountain railway at an exhibition : coming up in the dark I had not really seen it. To the left the valley lay far below, broken with low hills, each with its red-roofed village capping the summit. The valley sweeps broadly up among these low hills to rise suddenly to the steep rocky sides and serrated tops of the Djurdjuras. To-day they were indigo and silver.

Round and round we spun ; about 17 miles was our average, to keep it up we speeded down hill. Frankly I had no stomach for it. However, even then the fatalistic atmosphere of the people was settling upon me. I was even writing in jerks and spasms in my note-book when round a sharp corner we met a fellow-fatalist, who sprang across the road in front of us to herd his cattle. Up on a heap of stones, which a paternal government servant had providentially dumped just there, down on to the road with a bump, and we passed him, unhurt, on this road which, twisting and turning, rises 3,000 feet in 40 kilometres, or 26 miles ! He ran after us cursing, his grey beard flying, his robes swinging, while his flock emerged from the perilous positions in which they had sought refuge.

Thus we learnt one of the perils of the road—the way in which the *indigène* loses his head, and the way the cattle straggle and even sleep across the road.

The sky never seemed bluer or the world more gracious, and my position, buttoned up in a case like a mummy, more foolhardy and perilous.

Down we went back through Fort National, where we



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got some petrol. Leaving Tizi Ouzou behind us, we slid down from Fort National to Mekla, 2,000 feet, in about 15 miles, zigzag down the face of a mountain. Up again to Azazghur, another 20 kilometres, rising to 1,200 feet.

We lunched sumptuously at a small inn. I am sorry I did not note the name.

In a clean stone-floored room we were served by a pretty pleasant girl, who told us that she and *Madame la Patronne* made the delicious *pâté de foie gras* themselves. There were Arabs eating their *déjeuner* and drinking wine in the same room, the first time we had seen them: it surprised us. But it is usual in all the country districts, as we realized later. After lunch we started for Bougie via El Ksur.

The map showed a straightish road and we had then no contour map. We were in for the greatest surprise of our tour.

When we had mounted for 12 kilometres, and reaching a hamlet, we still saw before us an interminable spiral of road running along the edge of the gorge, which fell unbroken to the plain, another ten still mounting, then fourteen on the top of a range apparently, and only slightly mounting, but no sign of a descent, we got anxious. To the west was a wonderful panorama of hills, but the road was so narrow and the fall so abrupt from its unguarded edge that even P. found it trying, and to my consternation said he felt a slight mountain sickness. It was *very* cold and we were quite in the dark as to the road. No one had told us of this ascent. Ahead we could see that it went still higher and we wondered whether another snow pass would stop us or if there was anywhere to spend the night, for only tiny groups of houses composed the



A STREET IN AZAZGHUR.



READY FOR THE DAY'S MARCH

*Face p. 32.*





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villages we passed. We found afterwards that the end of the more gradual ascent was the Col de Tigdint, 2,800 feet above sea level, 2,500 of which we had climbed in 48 kilometres, or about 32 miles.

From Tigdint, 15 kilometres, is a comparatively slight descent of about 300 feet to the Pass of Talmez. From there to El Ksur the road is incredibly steep, but with such marvellous skill is it laid for the great part in long zig-zags, that although I clung on with both hands, as one sped down to keep the average of 17 miles, I had no idea of the gradient. Actually in 18 kilometres, about 13 miles, it falls 700 metres, a little over 2,000 feet.

The scenery from Azazghur to El Ksur is of an infinite variety. This was only our second day, and we had not become accustomed to the constant variety. From Azazghur to Yacarene the road rises in a series of long slopes with sharp turns and passes through extensive forests.

About half-an-hour from Azazghur we broke our belt-fastener, and we then learned that no matter how completely lonely the country may appear, as if from the ground, in the most desolate spots, arise children and men, seldom women. They close round you with the curiosity of monkeys ; but are more than willing to assist.

With the stories one had been told of the dangers of the roads these crowds gave one, at first, the pleasurable thrill of possible adventure. All they want is cigarettes, which we always carried.

The views are truly wonderful on this route, which is frequented by motors, and it speaks for the French road-making when, realizing the ascent, one sees large, heavy cars steadily climbing.

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From Tagma Pass one gets a panorama with the sea to the north and the snow-capped Djurdjura extending to the south over a sea of forests, to the eastern horizon on the plain.

It is one of the most wonderful sights, only surpassed that day by the view as we started the long descent from Talinely, where, down the long, open valley of El Ksur river, one could follow the coast line, which is a series of small bays in the huge sweep of the Bay of Bougie, where the hills and mountains fall abruptly to the sea. Part of this descending road passes along a barren looking rocky gorge where the forest ceases. Grand, but bleak.

As one comes down the last long slopes the little town of Bougie, on its steep promontory, appears peaceful and beautiful, and one thinks of the contrast since the stormy centuries in which pirates made it a stronghold, only lesser than Bone, Lacalle and Alger, from which they harassed and defied Europe! Here I wanted to stop. The beautiful bay and the picturesque town added to the slightly frazzled feeling consequent on the whirling journey down the hill—all these said: "Stop at Bougie."

"Why stop at Bougie when there is light to get on by?" and then I knew that P. and I had started with different ideas. Mine that the bus was a means of travel and seeing things, his that travelling was a means of trying the bus; mine to stop in the quaint places, his to do as many miles a day as possible.

So we passed Bougie and made Kerrata our next objective.

We had at that time no map and no guide, so the road was always full of surprises.

This road is the ordinary motor route to Biskra and is

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traversed daily by motors and chars-à-bancs, but not, I believe, in the dark and without lights.

In all our tour there was hardly a day that we were not benighted or had to race home in the last vestige of twilight.

So it was our second day. The sunset was tinting the sky as we passed Bougie, with the incomparable view. It is quite a large town and dates back from Roman days as Saldie, later as Bedega. Passing through many vicissitudes of Spanish conquest, Turkish annexation, and the occupation by pirates with attendant battle and bloodshed, it was first taken by the French in 1853, when it was quite a small town comparatively.

In the Khabyle rising of 1871 it was a centre of the rebels' fruitless efforts to throw over the alien rulers.

As we flew along the first 50 kilometres the day closed in. The villages and woods and mountains in the fading light were extraordinarily beautiful. As we turned into the Chalet el Akra the sun was setting. This gorge is nearly ten kilometres long, so narrow that it is a sort of rift in the mountains; the highest point, we were told, is 3,000 feet above the river bed. The road winds in and out of the tower-like pointed rocks over bridges, through tunnels, and emerges at Kerrata about 600 feet higher than at the entrance.

The French troops entered this part of the country through this gorge in 1864, two years after the beginning of the road, which was not completed till 1870, and is a beautiful piece of engineering.

In the daylight this gorge, though wonderful, lacks mystery. Its hard, bare rocky sides and scrubby vegetation are almost ugly.

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At sunset its depths and heights seemed extraordinary and the twilight held out about half-way.

It was nearly dark as we swung round a corner into a piece of road under repair, through which we crashed and bumped up to the springs in granite cobbolds, which are laid on about two feet deep and crushed in later by rollers. After we had successfully weathered that we lit the lights and it was an eerie feeling—a wall of rock to the left and a sheer drop to the right, along a narrow winding road, and I do not mind confessing that I hated that five miles more than I have hated anything before or since. I thought of all the things that might happen. However, nothing did then, although the next morning, two miles from the start, we discovered the front wheel was about to sever its connection with the rest of the firm, of which more anon!

The hotel at Kerrata is well-known to travellers, as this route is the common one from Algiers to Biskra.

In the morning we were able to appreciate the scenery and made up our minds to go back through the gorge and see it by daylight.

It was not so impressive, although nothing could detract from the magnificent height of the tooth-shaped pinnacles which rose sheer from the water's edge.

At the usual speed affected by motor-cyclists we ran back about three kilometres. It was bitterly cold, and here and there one could see monkeys cuddled up on the heights where the sun shone. The gorge is so narrow that no sun penetrates.

As we were returning to Kerrata, I, the watchful passenger, packed irrevocably in the little case of a car into which I fitted as the worm in the kernel of a nut, noticed a

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strange little noise. A very little noise; one gets so accustomed to the noise of the engine that it is as silence with reference to new sounds. Having drawn the pilot's attention to it I began looking about and I located it in the front wheel. Thoroughly rattled, I called "Stop" so suddenly that we did stop. A new peril was then unveiled to the uninitiated, viz., that it is possible so to put on a wheel that it runs itself off its axle. We were just in time. It was just off on its own—our front wheel. I don't know what happens if at twenty-five miles an hour your front wheel comes off: we nearly did learn, and I imagine that all other worldly knowledge would have departed from us if we had.

So in that arctic gorge we had to put it right. Ball bearings seem to be possessed of seven devils each when the hands are cold and operations have to be performed on a narrow stone parapet some 150 feet above a mountain stream.

Even here, where we had only perceived monkeys, the usual group of idlers appeared.

Three chars-à-bancs passed. It is not the custom of the country to offer succour to the disabled. I always imagine that if we had gone over some mountain precipice and hung like the "rock-a-bye-baby" rhyme on the tree tops below, the driver of a char-à-banc would call the attention of his "rubber-necks" to the phenomenon and pass along.

From Kerrata to Setif is 63 kilometres, from Setif to Biskra another 150 kilometres. Our idea was to make Biskra the same day, but what with the delay caused by the front wheel going wrong, the rain and the snow and a head wind, it was not possible. In fact, when we got



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to Setif my prudent mind and cold and weary body cried aloud that we should stop at Setif.

Setif is surely the coldest and dreariest spot on earth ! At any rate it is an "also ran" for the cold stakes. From Kerrata the first part of the road, as far as Ain-a-Bessa, runs along, or rather near, the coast of the Gulf of Bougie, where a narrow green plain runs down between the mountains to the sea. This is cultivated with vines, and is incredibly green and beautiful. Cherry blossom and almond and peach blossom in great masses and dotted about in small bunches with odd little ashy-grey trees, like ghosts of poplars, showed up against the indigo shadows of the high mountains which bound the scene in all directions.

The road rises and falls, running through low hills and passes, turning and winding, touching 1,160 metres (= 3,500 feet) at Telieseltinn, from whence it drops 500 feet to the comparatively level upland which extends to the Aures mountains, through which it passes to the Sahara.

About thirty miles from Kerrata the road is bare and bleak and desolate, with but a few unhappy looking trees. With the road out of repair for some miles and full of deep holes full of water, and a sort of blizzard in our teeth, we were not very happy.

The scenery is wild but *triste*. The massive ranges of mountains, notably the Babor, with snow tops and cold blue streaks of snow in the gorges down the sides of the heights, are magnificent, and if we had had a few hours' sun it would have helped us to appreciate it more.

Cereals are grown here, but it was early for the crops at this height.

After struggling with the elements and the bad road

## Fort National and Michelet

we reached Setif about two, with still 150 kilometres to go to complete our itinerary for the day.

Setif, except for lunch, seemed devoid of attractions, a modern tram-ridden town with what looked like fairly good shops. The next piece of road promised to be lonely in the extreme. On the before-mentioned plateau its inhospitable waste is sparsely populated.

No sign of habitation for 40 or 50 kilometres and the road, for the most part, badly cut up.

The holes were so deep and so wide that the whole machine would jolt in and out.

The wind blew flat in our faces. We started knowing that we had only three and a half hours' daylight, and feeling the absolute necessity of doing the 150 kilometres, as there was no place to rest the night *en route* as far as we could discover. Since, we have learnt that there is an hotel at Ampêre.

Immediately out of Setif our despairing curses rose through the wind and rain as we discovered two punctures.

Three-quarters of an hour rushed from us and only three kilometres off the 150.

Up and off, tearing, rushing, bumping past scenery for the most part bleak and obliterated by the pouring rain.

Past mountain-girt lakes.

Past the first strings of camels we had seen.

About half-way the rain ceased and a sand-storm took its place.

Seeing milestones in the road showing we were getting nearer and nearer to Batna, I suggested making for it and counted down to "Batna 21," and with rising spirits thought of shelter.



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Suddenly I saw "Batna 71," and to my anguish realized that my pilot had not given up the idea of pushing on. We had got on another road that leads round to Batna through various places, including MacMahon, where we decided to stay the night and make Batna next day. So on we went, presently leaving the main road. Sunset found us on a narrow road which was sign-posted "MacMahon." You will not find "MacMahon" on most maps, and when you do it is generally called Ain Touta.

Our first impressions of desert scenery were secured here, although, of course, it is not the desert proper. Empty spaces of scrub, with curious rocky hills of all sorts of different formations; and higher hills, even mountains, in the distance.

At sunset we had the extraordinary green, pink and purple luminosity thrown on the low hills which look like petrified dunes as the level places look like petrified desert.

But darkness soon fell upon us and the road was narrow. We were very exhausted with the cold and rain, so this 50 kilometres seemed interminable.

The feeling of being pressed for time and the rushing through the air quite took away any enjoyment, and I vowed I would do no more unless we could make eighty to a hundred kilometres our day's run. I felt I wanted to see the country, even to stop and commit the outrages called by us amateur artists' sketches.

My pilot seemed to have a distressing aversion to lighting lamps, and plunging along in the dark was to me terrifying and painful physically by reason of the jolting, swaying and bumping. However, we did reach Ain Touta or MacMahon at seven o'clock, two hours after sunset.



STREET SCENE AT SIDI OKBAR, NEAR BISKRA.



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If I was tired and, I confess, cross, P. was worse, and possibly with more reason, as he had been exposed to the elements, while I was behind the wind screen, and also he had had the strain of thinking of the engine, which at that time, before he had learnt by experience how to nurse it, was not doing so very well.

The hotels at Michelet and Kerrata were as the Ritz compared to the so-called hotel at MacMahon. However, it is not supposed to be a halting-place for tourists, and you will not find the hotel mentioned in any guide book.

We had a squalid meal and endured the terrifying looking beds with qualms.

We had been on the road since eight-thirty, excepting for our lunch at Setif. It was really too much, and the best temper must get frayed and the stoutest spirit damped with so long a time of cold and discomfort, especially two days running. If I were doing it again I should stop at Bougie and Setif.

We consoled ourselves with the promise of a nice easy run to Biskra via Kantara (80 kilometres) on the morrow.

I was taken, by the kindness of the *Patronne*, into their living-room. I do not know how so many people lived in it.

In one corner a table was laid. Before the fire three women and three babies, the latter all crying, were sitting.

In another corner was an immense and dreadful-looking bed, and all about were sideboards, cupboards and non-descript furniture. The cooking was done in a room beyond, and all the food apparently had to be carried through his living-room to the dark caves which served as dining-rooms for the public.

The next morning we were up at seven-thirty. After

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a great struggle a pint of cloudy hot water was produced and we got breakfast and started.

One point was the incredible cheapness of this food and lodging. I think it was about twelve francs for the two of us !

Again we had a wind in our faces and the weather played all its dirty tricks upon us. Rain, sleet, snow, drizzle, and at last sun. Through El Kantara, where we had no time to stop. It is worth while stopping there, and another time I should do so. There is a comfortable hotel, and it is a weird sort of landscape among the Aures mountains, which, low here, merge into a further range of snow-topped crags to the north.

The sight of Biskra was welcome, and the prospect of a bath and a civilized bed and board cheered us on.

This chapter is rather a cheerless record because we were new to it and over-did it ; but it must not be imagined that we did not enjoy it. The vicissitudes of the weather and over-tiredness accumulated over three days left us somewhat depressed, but on the whole it was wonderful, and we had some amusing moments.

## Chapter 4

## The Desert

**T**OUGGOURT was our starting-place—the rail end.

It is 100 kilometres south of Biskra and the railway crawls down through the desert. Even at that time of year, February, it was very hot.

There are no comforts of any kind. One takes one's own lunch. In our case we had none, as the man who saw us to the train left it sitting on the *concierge's* table. This discovery at seven o'clock with eight hours' journey before us was distinctly disconcerting. We entertained grave suspicions of all our fellow-passengers who displayed comfortable-looking parcels of food and good-looking bottles of wine and Evian water. Surreptitiously we examined all the parcels we could, trusting to find evidence in the number marked on each that another's greed would prove the reason of our famine. But not a hope! Having alarmed or offended all of them, we had to sit down and reflect bitterly that even the most lavish tipping will not ensure the care and attention one feels to be one's due.

The travelling Briton is for the most part like that. It is the "See the Conquering Hero comes" attitude of our warlike ancestors watered down to the needs of civilization: its expression is, of course, tempered by the equally British reserve which tries to prove to the sorely tried that any privation is more bearable than the con-



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fession of being bothered about personal matters. A French party starting lunchless would, I imagine, have no shame in turning over every one's impedimenta, in the search for the lost provisions. And I can hear the animated discussion with the unlucky servant by whose oversight the cataclysm had arrived. Who can say which is the better way? A man was sent flying back to the hotel. He returned a minute before the train started with a large clothes-brush, the arrival of which was never explained, and a message to say that the parcel was not in the hall. So we sat in our places furious but outwardly resigned, although I felt certain that in spite of my British pride my expression was exact to the picture of Haigha in *Alice Through the Looking-glass* in chains and in jail.

At this, the darkest moment, Mahommed galloped up with a bag such as workmen in England carry their tools in. From its murky depths he produced a loaf of bread, a tin of sardines, two hard-boiled eggs, a bottle of wine, a bottle of water and two glasses, oh! and also oranges. As the shipwrecked mariner who finds a plum pudding, a spanner and a coil of rope washed up from the wreck, so we hailed this mixed assemblage. But we did wish for a knife, spoon or fork!

The train crawled from one little station to the next, and it was extremely hot. The track following the railway looked quite good enough for the bus and we lamented having given in to advice and taking the train. At four o'clock we were at Touggourt.

An interesting feature of this part of the country is the frequent artesian wells which are replacing the uncertain sand-filled wells of ancient days. The discovery of the course of the subterranean river made this possible and





THE PIPER.

*Face p. 44.*



# The Desert

apparently the water is inexhaustible. From a depth of about 300 feet they pour out water about 400 litres or 250 gallons a minute.

Touggourt itself is a sort of group of Arab villages surrounding the practical and uninteresting modern French municipal buildings, offices and hotels.

We were conducted to a standing camp where we were to spend the night, starting early the next morning.

Our first sight of the really open desert—for at Biskra there are villages and oases in sight all round, being at sunset, seemed to us extraordinarily beautiful. No colour save the pale sand and a silver sky speckled with little purple red clouds. Later, the sky turned green and the clouds pink, and so night fell. In spite of the howling of what must be ten thousand dogs the silence seemed unbroken. The little row of small mud mosques, so well-known to all tourists, looked unreal. I tried to do an impression in water colour, but the thinnest colour seemed too heavy and substantial.

We dined in a big tent and after dinner an American and two daughters appeared and joined us at the end of the tent, where with flaps up we listened for the first time to real desert music with a background of fierce flames from a wood fire. One has imagined that these plays, such as "The Garden of Allah" and "Chu Chin Chow," had shown one something of this. It is not so. It is quite a different colour. The thin high pipe, with its chromatic plaintive, unending and apparently unphrased, tuneless song, is quite different to anything we ever heard.

There were three of them, two with drums, and they rolled and leant over each other as they played as though the piper were telling them a tale. He, indeed, was a

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*raconteur*, and on the march he would sing and the rest would roll and scream with laughing. I asked Mahommed ; he said he made up verses as he went along, and that they were very laughable ! His reticence when asked for the joke gave me to believe that they were too Rabelaisian for my delicate ears.

The next morning we rose early for the start ; the air was very fresh, in fact, I think I might say very cold.

On awakening to a confusion of sounds, like nothing so much as what one imagines a battle to sound like, I pushed my dishevelled head through the slit in the tent which serves as a door. It was only a perfectly peaceful conversation between the various groups of people who belonged to the camp.

A little further off, to sounds of blows and curses, the camels were being loaded for our expedition. The American family, up before us, seemed to be embroiled in this battle. They wanted saddles on the camels. They were rather hampered in not having much French, and our friend Mahommed took every advantage of this by affecting a blank appearance with no understanding. When we got out, the camel drivers and people were making a great show of trying to fit saddles on to the humps of two protesting camels. Of course, the attempt was both absurd and impossible. This is the way of the Oriental. It serves two purposes. Firstly, it proves the zeal that should lead to much *bakshish* ; secondly, it proves without argument that the endeavour is useless. Not that they mind argument, far from it ! What they do not care for is the reasoned argument which ends soon and is, moreover, quiet. When you see two Arabs, Indians, or Burmans engaged in such wordy warfare that knives seem to be

# The Desert

imminent, it is as a rule only a discussion of some unimportant and unnecessary affair.

I don't know what the camels thought of it all. They sat, as they always do, waving their necks about with their ineffable air of suppressed outrage, making noises which to the uninitiated signify approaching and painful dissolution.

A mule saddle perched on a camel's hump is a comic sight. Add to it half-a-dozen yelling, gesticulating Arabs with absurd pieces of rope apparently trying to improvise girths, and you have the scene. The Arabs fully enjoyed the fact that in order to stop it all Mr. Linder would be compelled to give the order which confessed his error; which after ten minutes' anxious turmoil he did.

I do not know, and never shall, how much stage managing was done for our benefit, but the illusion was complete. We were in the desert camping as if we belonged to the country, only with more comfort, I imagine. We each had a "bell" tent, and there was also a cooking tent.

Sand and sand and sand! A sea of sand broken by dunes, and to the south-west by great oases thick with the usual date palms. There is a chain of these oases reaching far south, following the course of the subterranean rivers Mya and Ighargar.

The wind was cold, the sun hot. The air quivered, silvery blue; colour there was none. The sand looked nearly white, the sky silver, the scrub plants and the palms a solid grey.

Jogging along, seated on the top of my folded tent and bed superimposed upon the hump of the largest camel, I felt regal and as precariously perched as any Tsar. It was a high beast; it looked half starved and

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made such a fuss about getting up that I was sure it was about to die. It roared and groaned and waved its head about, its supercilious stare changed to contemptuous despair. When it finally raised its hind quarters with a jerk, my solicitude turned entirely on to myself, as I expected to dive on to the sand, which suddenly looked as hard as granite. Before I could do anything its front part was up, and I was sliding towards the ground, down the slope to his tail. One doesn't fall off. I can't think why. Of course, these camels have no reins or any kind of rudder by which a passenger may control his course. He sways off with you. Rolling and pitching, he rubs against other camels. He stops to complain of the world in general, he stoops to bite at the scrub, all with the same air of weary exasperation, and each action producing a different kind of heave which, until one learns that one is out of the rules of gravity on his back, are most disturbing. The camel drivers fall to the rear and chatter and play pipes, while for all you know the camel may at any moment bolt with you into the Sahara and out the other side without stopping. One soon realizes that they can't run, and that their only ambition in life is to take as long as possible doing anything.

It all looked very picturesque—striped rugs over all the untidy bundles and queer things hanging about on the camels. The kitchen camel clanked along with all the pots and pans dancing and bumping. We had five camels and five big donkeys and a skeleton pony, whose staring coat and bad condition could not disguise his breeding and good looks. On the whole, the Arab steed is a disappointing affair as seen by the tourist.

We jogged on for 20 kilometres and camped among the



## The Desert

grand dunes. We camped in between two dunes—a fatal error, as we discovered to our cost next day.

It was amusing to watch them pitch the camp. No one did any real work excepting Abdul Hamid. Every minute a lusty voice would yell, “O-a-a! Abdul Hamid!” and he would appear—old, bent and tottering, with a little high-cheek-boned face and a narrow goatish beard.

Breakfast we had had on the way. Seated on the sand dune opposite we saw the mysterious rites of tea-making. A fire burned just outside the tent, a hand and arm flashed out and put a saucepan upon it; presently the saucepan was snatched up and retired into the tent to be replaced by a teapot, which was snatched up as though he were a hurried burglar by Abdul Hamid, who rushed with it and popped it on the table with the air of one who has faced many dangers in a good cause.

Of course the tea, as ever, was extremely nasty; the dejected tea leaves floated upon the lukewarm water, and when tinned milk was added it was a dreadful concoction. Spicy cakes made up the feast.

We had noticed all the afternoon great clouds coming up, and about five the wind began to blow, and the air was full of little whispering and hissing noises, which increased to whistling. Then the sand threw itself into the air like thin waves of a sea. A black pall spread slowly from horizon to zenith to the north-east before we realized that a respectable little sand-storm was developing itself. It was nearly sunset. We shall never forget the sky. Rain fell in the distance. It looked as if some one was drawing lines obliquely down the landscape with a charcoal pencil and then smudging it. Presently rain fell on us in great drops, and all muddy with sand. As it passed



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the sky turned green and chrysoprase at the horizon, merging to rose-pink—to silver blue, while the great cloud banks went red, purple and smoky brown.

As we watched the colours changed and the violet of the night sky spread over them and blotted it all out. The clouds had gone and stars were hanging from the sky as they hang in the East. They never look like holes pricked in the firmament as they do in Europe.

After this exhibition the cold was too much to dine outside. We had no dining tent, so we all dined in my bed-tent.

A very good dinner, if a bit sandy. After dinner Mahommed came in and had coffee with us, also a glass of cognac. As a son of the Prophet this seemed odd, but he did not seem to take it as an unusual thing at all.

He told us a great many interesting things. Extraordinarily intelligent and well educated, he could talk of European and even American politics with accuracy and from an interesting point of view. He rather brushed aside my questions about Moslem and India and the Caliphate. He told us that since the war the Arabs, Khabyles, and all of the subject races, having fought in the French interests, were being given the vote and could elect some further proportion of members to the Chamber of Deputies than before. He did not seem to think very much of this concession, on the grounds that the representative elected by apparently free votes was somehow always a docile creature—an instrument of the unpopular foreign Government.

It is neither fair nor possible to accept these sort of statements, as it is a fact to remember that no conquered race is contented. The Arabs, he said, have still ambitions,

## The Desert

but no hope of achievement of independence. "We are," he said, "too divided by jealousy." And he recounted a plan for a general rising which was to have taken place in 1864. When some sheikh on the eastern side raised an army and massacred a French army, Suliman, a chieftain of the west, apparently was not satisfied with his position of command and went over to the French side. A great opportunity was thus lost, never to return. His hatred of the Jews, which he expressed and declared to be general, was very deep and venomous. During the turbulent years of conquest the Jews were enfranchised, which gave rise on the one side to jealousy, and on the other to intrigue and money-getting, by which the Jew has ever abused any privilege or power he may attain to. Apart from such abuse, due to such an unfair advantage being given them, it is inherent in the Moslem to hate and despise the Jew.

Next day the American family went with their tents, etc., and we had the caravan to ourselves as arranged. Early we started to ride to a lake about 20 kilometres away up and over the great dunes. I rode one of the small camels, but changed later to the big donkey. The camel seemed to delight in walking up and down the dunes in the steepest places, and his malevolent expression as he tilted me backwards or forwards was not to be borne.

It was a lovely day. We lunched by the lake, where we were supposed to do some shooting. I do not know what the birds were. They looked like moorhens, and sat in groups on the mirror of water far out from the shore. Abdul, he of the pipe, carried a very long gun, and Mahommed said it was quite *en règle* to shoot them, and seemed hurt and surprised because we didn't care to

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shoot them sitting. P. sat and potted at a bottle with his Browning and we rode about and lunched till three o'clock, when we were shepherded and mounted by Mahommed for the return.

The negro guide walked ahead. I had suspicions very early that something was wrong, as we seemed to have the sun on all sides of us alternately. At last, just about half-an-hour before dark, Mahommed said: "We have lost the camp, the wind has blown away our footsteps; we must decide what we will do." Behind us the oases showed clearly against the setting sun. Temelhut, with its high minaret, was beginning to show twinkling lights amongst the black silhouette of its thousands of palms. Mahommed's suggestion was that we should make for this village, only 15 kilometres over the dunes, which in the gloom looked more and more like the sea, with waves running high as far as you could see! He said that the Marabouts and the Grand Marabouts were friends of his, and that, with Arab hospitality, they would put their all at our disposal. This idea did not seem to us quite so thrilling as it did to him. Never did a primitive bed in a tiny tent seem so alluring! Anyhow, we started. The *barikot*<sup>1</sup> was so slow that I decided to walk and lead him. It was a queer, eerie march. Up the dune knee-deep in soft sand, down the other side and up again. From the tops we could see Temacine sparkling with little lights as darkness fell. At the bottom nothing was visible but the dunes, sloping up to the sky it seemed. Faster and faster we walked, but Temelhut did not come any nearer. Mahommed appeared nervous, and the two camel drivers, who were leading the camel and thr<sup>ee</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Barikot*, a large donkey.

# The Desert

donkeys, were cursing and thrashing the poor beasts. So night fell. The stars came out ; but it was very dark. About half-way to Temelhut we got sight of a flare from our camp. It looked about a hundred miles away ! How we did curse them for not lighting it before.

Then we had to decide whether to go on to the certainty of Temelhut, which was now about 7 kilometres away, on flat desert, as we had cleared the dunes, or return to the camp over the dunes again.

We lit a flare with the straw of the bottles we had brought for lunch, and got a reply signal, so we decided to go back to camp.

As far as we knew there was no reason, excepting the want of food and discomfort, for not resigning ourselves to a night out between the dunes, sheltered from wind in a bed of sand ! It began to seem quite an alluring scheme to me as I plodded on, stopping at intervals to empty half the Sahara out of my shoes, footsore and breathless too.

Up and down, on and on ! Such suspense, too, for we could only see the fire from the tops of the highest dunes. We guided ourselves by the stars in between glimpses of the "will-o'-the-wisp"-like gleam. You must remember there is no firewood in the desert and they had to husband their resources.

I don't think I have explained that the guide had gone "into the blue" while we had our council at sunset. Mahommed knew not the desert, and the two camel drivers seemed scared at losing the tracks.

At last from the top of a dune we saw the flare, as it were, down a valley. In daylight we could have walked on the flat to it. We could hear their voices, so we shouted. They replied, and our joy was great, until the fire suddenly

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disappeared and we were more lost than ever. We cursed again that we had not continued our original march on Temelhut. We seemed to have fallen between two stools. P. said he thought he had the stars, and then *they* began to fade.

On and on it seemed, hours and years, when, suddenly, we found ourselves in front of a perfectly strange camp, surrounded with mountainous dunes far higher than those amidst which we had left our camp in the morning, now a century ago !

P. pulled me aside, Mahommed was apparently shaking like a jelly ; but we bade him reconnoitre. It seemed so odd that he should be afraid, and it made P. doubtful and me thoroughly alarmed.

However, as usual, the adventure ended in laughter and absurdity. They were all hiding, and had put out the lights in terror at the time we had shouted because the Sahara is full of devils. We were received with shouts and hand-shakings. Hot tea and cognac within five minutes of our return refreshed us. The cook moaned over us and talked as a nurse to frightened children ; but would answer no questions about the fires having been put out and their hiding. After dinner Mahommed came in weary, but smiling and refreshed. Quite forgetful of his own fears, he told us of the foolishness of the people of the camp, who even now feared for the fate of the lost guide.

There are, it seems, *incroyables* in the desert who cry out in high voices to deceive people, who if they reply or possibly even if they are silent, unless they can hide, are tracked down and devoured. This and many other devils had alarmed the camp both on their own behalf and ours.



# The Desert

Mahommed and the donkey-drivers had had to compete with their fears born of the further knowledge concerning murdered travellers. These cry and hover over the spot upon which they died in the form of a light. If you follow them you are somehow lost and die.

None of these people, it must be remembered, were real desert people.

We slept that night; but the wind sent little showers of sand whispering down my tent which was slackly pitched, and I woke up and lay sweating and shaking with terror born of Mahommed's tales of devils and over-tiredness.

Next day we started for Temelhut and Temacine, where we were to spend our last two nights.

I rode a camel. The *barikot*, with his hard wooden saddle, his stirrups which are merely tied on to either end of a rope and hung over the saddle, so that you wobble if you lean on one side or the other, had left me with very little skin on important parts of my person.

So, wrapped in a fur coat, I sat regally perched. Once again I was horrified to find, after watching a strange bundle on the camel in front, that it was the fowls that formed the *pièces de résistance* of our commissariat, travelling tied in a bunch each by one leg.

Their combs were swollen and they were a cruel sight.

I stopped the procession and demanded that they should be made comfortable.

Much surprise was expressed, and Mahommed tried to soothe me by saying it was their *habitude* so to travel, and therefore it could not hurt them.

Once the people grasped my intention not to proceed until this matter was put right, the zealous struggle

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ensued to get some impossible standard of comfort for the fowls. One was put in a Moorish stool and laced in so that her head was poking out through the carved design like a lady looking through the window. This was the work of the little old man-of-all-work. Some were put loose in a sack and some in a basket.

“What matters it, as they die to-night or the latest to-morrow?” was the remark made, not in words intelligible to me, but in expression and atmosphere, proclaiming that under necessity even wise men had to bow to fools—even female fools, moreover!

And so we arrived at Temacine and Temelhut, which deserve, I think, a chapter to themselves.



## Chapter 5    The Desert, Temelhut and Temacine

**W**E left the camp on the dunes for Temacine early, a bright, hot sun and cool breeze combining to our enjoyment. It was a really hot noon, and gave one some idea of what heat on the desert might mean.

The guide turned up in the morning, having spent the night out. To people who know the desert well this is nothing. The camp followers, who were all village folk, made a great fuss. He smiled all over his countenance when he found we were not angry with him for losing us. No one could be angry on such a day !

The piper played all the way and sang his ribald songs, so that the peaceful air was disturbed with the rude laughter of his delighted audience.

We stopped at noon for breakfast ; it was bakingly hot, and in the open desert there was no shade that we could see.

We sat down in the sun while preparations were being made, and lo ! there was a banqueting hall ! The striped blanket tied over two thorn bushes as a canopy and the feast spread on another beneath it : it was pretty and made a beautiful shade from the heat and glare.

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All along the route in the sort of valley through the dunes were very green bushes and clumps of pretty yellow flowers, white stuff rather like *gypsophila*, and some pinkish mauve ones. They have their roots very deep down, and get moisture from some tributary of the subterranean river before alluded to.

The camels grumbled and grunted along, the piper walked ahead in his blue *burnous*, and one settled down as the camel swayed and lurched along.

After an hour or so of uninterrupted progress of this kind on an unchanging landscape, a sort of trance-like condition is arrived at. I had ceased to take any notice of anything long before I found myself in a cloud of mosquitoes in the marshy ground approaching Temacine. Out of the cool date groves they rushed in myriads.

There we could see into the shady depths of these palm groves. The palms stand in deep water with ferns and flowers growing on the banks of the irrigation canals, which divide it into parallelograms. A sort of heavy stillness emanates from those cool depths, incredibly green—the flitting of birds and their little noises, the mosquitoes and butterflies, the only sign of life.

After skirting round two sides of the dates we were on a rising ground facing west. Nearly all of it is a cemetery, and there are some of the little low, thick mosques near the top whose silhouette against the sky-line is so appealing.

The mosquitoes were still round us in clouds when Mahommed called a halt. We started walking up the hill to look for a good camping place. Half-way up to our left lay the romantic-looking town of Temelhut, with its red mud walls and numerous domes, and great white dome marking the great mosque. On the other

## The Desert and Temelhut

hand, the walled town of Temacine, with tier on tier of mud-houses crowned with one of the new, ugly modern minarets, which look like a municipal clock tower with a "Made in Germany" expression.

We passed the usual miserable-looking Bedouin camp. The idea one had of the proud, free Bedouin, with his mettlesome Arab horse, his flocks and herds, tents, camels and women, was in no wise corroborated. Never have I seen such squalor and misery! The drought of the two years 1919-1920, which followed several successive years of deficient rain, accounts for a good deal of his destitution, because in this part (the only part, alas! that we visited), his cattle, sheep and camels died almost to a head.

The poverty of these camps beggars description. Even to my eyes, trained to the simplicity of the poverty of rural India, this seemed the impossible in misery. The miserable tents, the state of dirt! It is contrary to the disposition of the Moslem to be dirty. If he has a house, ever such a little hovel, he whitewashes it inside and out, and all his leanings are towards cleanliness and order: so when you see encampments like these of the Bedouins of the Oued Rhir,<sup>1</sup> you may be sure that the last stage of poverty has been reached.

One sees groups of encampments making a sort of village. The wretched tents are patched and rotten, many of them seem to be mere shelters formed of sticks, old blankets and ropes. On the top of the slope here was such a one; a formless erection of pieces of blanket

<sup>1</sup> Oued Rhir—a district celebrated for its dates, whose prosperity and fertility have been greatly enhanced by the installation of artesian wells—situated between the subterranean rivers Oued Igharghar and Oued Mya (p. 63).

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and a sort of canvas; its front flap was turned up and showed the miserable interior. Against the background of its airless black recesses the forms of the family sitting just inside the threshold were visible. They were having a meal of coarse wheat-cake and something hot, probably coffee, which they were drinking out of rusty tins.

A man, a woman, a young woman and two children composed the family. By signs I asked permission to photograph them, which I did. Immediately the whole family were upon me asking for *bakshish*. And these really are the remains of the proud Bedouins who scoured the desert and owned the free existence of those whose life is healthy, and whose wants are so simple that Nature and the earth are to them as a kingdom. Let us hope that further south, away from tourists and over-government, some of them have survived in their glory.

While I was pondering on many things which give one to think in these parts, and behaving generally as a tourist must, staring, gaping, taking photographs and adding the meagre facts in my knowledge to my ignorant observation, P. had disappeared over the brow of the hill.

Turning to look down the way I had come, I was annoyed and horrified to see the camp was half pitched in the mosquito infested spot where we had dismounted.

The kitchen tent was up, Abdul Hamid could be seen in the dusk hopping briskly from one centre of activity to another. To sleep there was an impossibility; also we had told them to wait. So our British irascibility, always aroused by the independent action or disobedience of subordinates, rose high within me, and I hallooed and shouted in the undignified manner of the Christian.



A GLIMPSE OF TEMELHUT.

*Face p. 60.*





# The Desert and Temelhut

Activity continued in the camp, the only sign that I was audible being the advance of Abdul Hamid from the heap of luggage he was disentangling. Turning his face towards me and shading his eyes with his hand, he looked at me and, I suppose, seeing that I was in no comprehensible distress, returned to his task.

The tent *kalasi* continued erecting the tents, the cook began manipulating the Primus stove, while the boy started killing the fowl.

To any one who has not become inured to Oriental methods this is a most distressing execution. After an exciting chase, the bird is captured by one leg or wing and so carried protesting to the place of execution. Slowly the executioner searches for a blunt knife, and, squatting down with an air of detached absorption, saws it back and forth on the screaming wretch's throat. He is eviscerated and dismembered, or spitted, almost sooner than the echo of his last screech has departed. All this I saw, and realized that it meant that the idea of the position of the camp was settled.

I was determined we should not camp down there. P. arrived at that moment on the "Arab steed," and before the bird's last cry he was upon them.

After the first simulated shock of surprise, and a feeble effort upon Mahommed's part to make us believe that we had ordered the camp there, the Oriental bustle began.

Shouting and calling, with every appearance of immense haste and desire to obey us, as the *djinn* obeys the master of the lamp, they managed to take two hours to shift. This is the usual way of "taking it out" of the imperious European. It is a successful form of vengeance. It carries the maximum of annoyance to the victim, proving

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his unreasonableness, with very little opportunity for him to bite back.

So at eight o'clock we were summoned to our evening meal, during which the cook who waited upon us conveyed, by innuendo and deep sighs, his terrible fatigue and the extreme inconvenience of camping on such a spot.

The dinner, however, was good and the coffee hot. A glass of brandy restored the cook's good temper, and the *entente* was re-established.

After dinner Mahommed came and discoursed to us.

Temelhut is the headquarters of an old religious order, the Tidjania. The Grand Marabout and his family inhabit the mosque buildings and live a sort of patriarchal life amongst the villagers. This order is of some antiquity, according to Mahommed about the twelfth century, having the headquarters at Laghouat. The inhabitants of this region, the Oued Rhir, were formerly Berbers, whose light skins and fine features we always admired. Continual intermarriage with negroid peoples, however, has made these *Rooarha* (as I gathered they are called) very dark skinned and thick of feature. They are of some antiquity, suffering conquest and change under different races and dynasties until the fifteenth century, when they appear to have had a settled government only disturbed at intervals by the potentates of Alger, Tunis and Constantine, until the annexation by the French in 1844 and establishment of a protectorate. The Sultan of that date was contented to acknowledge the French protectorate, but his successor, one Solomon, said to have been a usurper, revolted in 1854. His efforts were fruitless, and the capital town, Touggourt, was invested and the French flag permanently hoisted.

# The Desert and Temelhut

The Khabyle rebellion of 1871 reached as far as Tougourt, and the rebels massacred the little garrison. This effort was severely punished, and there has been no outward trouble since.

From our camp in the clear evening light we could see the great chain of oases which follow the Oued Mya<sup>1</sup> and the Oued Igharghar subterranean rivers. In the days of the ancient wells even these oases were fertile and wonderful ; but since the introduction of the artesian wells by French enterprise, which tap the hidden flood of the above-mentioned subterranean rivers, their production has quadrupled and the population of these oases-towns has increased enormously—largely doubtless owing to the attraction offered to labour by the French capitalists, who now for the most part own these wonderful resources of the colony.

Mahommed told us that there are nearly two million palms. Since the plentitude of water, wheat and barley is grown in the Oued Rhir ; also other fruits and vegetables in the oases.

The plain on which we camped is the place where the great annual date market is held every October, when all the world makes holiday. The people of the south come up with their horses and their camels to sell them and to buy dates. It is a great festival by all accounts. Every one in gala attire, Kaid and chiefs, Touregs with their fleet white camels, poorer people, and Bedouins of a better class (so they do exist according to Mahommed), and, in fact, all the world and his wives. We were there the wrong time of the year (February and March) to see the picturesque caravans with their panoplied camels

<sup>1</sup> Oued—a river.

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

and fine tents. We saw a few camels so dressed up in Biskra for the benefit of fellow-tourists, some of whom took a few hours' ride on them in the desert, much as one has a camel ride in a Zoo, and were photographed in full regalia on their return !

The desert is a dream : our time was too short to do more for us than to give us a longing to do the real thing, to throw off the tourist chrysalis stage and become travellers in very deed.

We had stood on the top of the rising ground before dinner and over the palm trees and the two towns we could see the endless space between the silver sand and the pale sky westwards. We watched the shadows steal, mauve, over the sand as it turned saffron beneath the gentle tints of the western sky at sunset. Azure, turquoise, lemon, yellow, rose, pink, from one to another till imperceptibly all was grey and then blue as the stars came forth, and the light went. And we said, "Oh, we *will* return !" and I would give much if I thought it probable !

Mahommed told us of the breeders of running camels and the splendour of these pale cream-coloured creatures as opposed to the poor, blackish, mangy animals which we had seen and used.

He told us that they test these camels at birth by burying them to the neck in sand. According to how many days the infant can so last without nourishment is their strength and endurance calculated, and their value. They are watched and at the first sign of exhaustion they are exhumed and fed ! Some of the best, he declared, can last for eight days !

To the European idea this beginning would be enough to warp its disposition and undermine its strength for life.

# The Desert and Temelhut

He told us of an Arab saying, which can be applied as an insult as desired : “ If you ask a mule after his father, he holds his tail high ; should you ask for his mother, he hangs his head.”

Mahommed did not seem to appreciate the advantages brought by the French to this region. He was a very well read and intelligent person ; but I suppose it is more than could be expected of him to have no bias against the conquering race.

As regards the date culture by French enterprise, apparently in many cases they have a system whereby a contract is entered into between the owner of the plantation and the actual tiller of the soil. This contract, while varying in detail, is always on the ground of shares, which are in proportion to the harvest both of dates and the cereals and other produce which are grown in the dim wet aisles of the oases. From one-fifth to one-third is usually the share of the cultivator : the larger share when, as is not uncommon, the cultivator is the owner of the ground. This does not seem unfair when one considers that before the advent of the French and their artesian wells the harvest was subject to vicissitudes of drought, which rendered it uncertain, and under which it was possible that it could fail altogether in bad years.

The increase in the number of palms of recent years has been immense.

I am not sure whether the artesian wells are sunk by Government or whether owners and speculators do it at their own expense, but the borers and engineers are Government officials and part of their Public Works services.



# Through Algeria and Tunisia

Next morning we went to pay a visit to the Marabout of Temelhut.

We saw the Grand Mosque on our way. It is a tall building, square at the base, cornered off into a hexagon from about three-quarters of the way up to the dome, which is rather shallow. The walls and dome are of traced plaster which looks like fretted stone.

In the centre is the usual tomb surrounded with beautiful banners of all ages : these are, we gathered, presents or tributes from members of the order.

The town is very picturesque, the "horse-shoe" arched tunnels from court to court and the rich colours of the people's cloths the salient features.

The Marabout received us in a Moorish room which is arched at every angle to passages and alcoves quite bewildering. He told us through Mahommed that we should have let him know that we were coming, that he might have had a feast prepared for us. As it was he had ordered tea, having heard that English people preferred tea to coffee. While we were waiting for the tea, Mahommed told him of our having been lost and our plan of coming to the Mosque to ask for shelter. He said that everything would have been at our service.

Then the tea arrived ! Oh, anyone who may read these lines, forswear your nationality if it entails a reputation for the love of tea in Algeria !

It was like very hot mint-sauce with all the spices of Araby and all the sweets of the Indies added. Mercifully the cups were small, as we felt our courtesy would be impugned if we held out against his insistence on a second brew ! With it were little cone-shaped cakes which were made of cocoanut and oil and tasted like candles. It





THREE SONS OF THE GRAND MARABOUT, TEMELHUT.



## The Desert and Temelhut

was impossible to dissemble. They had to be eaten, and I was only wondering miserably what would happen if feeling sick was to develop into an active rebellion on the part of my interior. However, we acquitted ourselves with dignity and politeness and got away without catastrophe. This was all new to us, but I will refrain from further description of what anyone may see with little trouble for themselves.

Our last day on the desert was full of regrets at having so short a time, and as we saw the minaret of Touggourt on the sky-line coming nearer as we plodded along on our donkeys, we felt like people who, waking when an entrancing dream is in full swing, long to sleep again and finish it.

But there ! It was not to be ! A dreadful feast awaited us. The feast of honour, which consisted of pastry, fruit and sweet champagne, with the *pièce de résistance*, the lamb roasted whole called the *Meschoui*.

When we arrived we were conducted mysteriously and with ceremony behind the tent, and there we saw it being roasted. A sad sight ! Spitted on a thick stick from tail to jowl, he hung over a pit in which was the fire, supported by the ends of the spit on the edge of the pit. Two attendants turned him, while a third, armed with a long stick at the end of which was a bunch of grease-dripping rag, passed it over his browning carcase. The smells of spices and burning fat rose like the smoke of a sacrifice, and the high priests had the intent gravity appropriate to such a ceremony. Into our tent he was brought later on a huge dish. No knives or forks were provided ; we, and Mahommed with us, tore from the crisp carcase such delicate portions as we

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

each fancied. I seized upon a projection and behold a complete rib came out as easily as pulling a straw from a stack. It was good to the taste, and in the half-illumined tent, with the desert fading in the gloom beyond the open flaps, it was "in the picture."

I heard afterwards that etiquette demands a long sitting : we, being unaware of that, shortly suggested that the *Meschoui*, being too much for us to consume ourselves, should be presented to our caravan people. If Mahommed did feel it a breach of manners on our part, his exquisite Arab politeness did not allow us to guess it.

And so, after watching the stars hang their lamps from horizon to zenith, and the desert become formless and unreal in the dark, we went to bed in the sandy tents for the last time.

Next day it was the train at Touggourt and back to the amenities of Biskra. Our disinclination to leave the book of the desert when we had hardly seen the frontispiece, was only tempered by the prosaic longing of the pampered English for a *bath* !

## Chapter 6

## Timgad

THE journey back to Biskra in the hot little train was all too prosaic. The desert from a train window, and punctuated by dreadful active little stations, is shorn of its beauty.

The road which runs beside the railway nearly all the way was almost deserted. Just a few donkeys and an occasional group of camels moving in a cloud of dust and grunts and noise, struck a feeble note from the desert orchestra.

Two Belgian women and a party of French and Americans who had gone by train the day before to "see the desert," were too garrulous.

P. buried himself in a book, and I, trying to collect my impressions, realized fully that my time had been too short to see anything at all, while I had seen so much that the impressions were too vague and dream-like to find expression at all adequate. The only clear idea in this chaos was that somehow we *must* return. As the train crawled and rattled along I thought with dislike and a strange lack of courage of the long roads before us on the motor-bike, the speed we had to keep on the steep tortuous roads, and the chilly night that always fell an hour or two before we reached our destination. All this depressed me. I wanted to talk of it and our route.

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

So far nothing had been settled. Looking at the map it appeared to bristle with mountains everywhere. I had, of course, only to say that I wouldn't do it, but a perverse feeling that whatever happened the adventure should be finished, added to the idea of P. alone whizzing up and down the mountains, kept me to it.

We arrived at Biskra in the evening. In spite of the comforts of baths and a "proper" dinner, it all seemed out of tune, and after a good deal of discussion and map-reading, we decided to start as near early morning as the garage and hotel people would make it possible, for Batna and Timgad. Our only regret was that two days later there was to be a very wonderful *fantasie*—a kind of gymkhana, where feats of horsemanship would be exhibited. However, we hardened our hearts and left at nine o'clock for Timgad via Batna.

Up to now we had climbed mountains without any clear idea of where we were going to. In Biskra we were able to buy Conty's *Guide Bleu*, a pre-war edition, it is true, but it is a most helpful and meticulous guide, which has since been brought up to date.

We had to retrace our route as far as MacMahon.

Here I would point out that in my opinion we made a mistake in going from Setif to MacMahon via Colbert and Ngous. It is a longer route to Biskra and the road in some parts is very bad. Our idea was to avoid doing the same route twice.

There is this to be said for the Colbert-Ngous route: it is a road little used, and the desolate tract of country between Ngous and the cross-road to Barika is interesting, with its queer striated craggy hills, whose rocks seem twisted and thrown about.



# Timgad

The road from El Kantara to MacMahon is good, but tortuous and hilly. MacMahon is 2,000 feet higher than Biskra, and 1,200 higher than El Kantara, while Batna is another 750.

We arrived in Batna at half-past twelve. There are several hotels there. We made a bad choice, for although the magic word *bains* appeared against the name of one of them, we somehow missed it, and the one we chose was a squalid affair. Not being sure of the name of the one we patronized, I will draw a veil over its drawbacks.

The beautiful road to Timgad (36 kilometres) climbs up to Lambesi through a pastoral bit of country. Lambesi is one of the many old Roman towns, the remains of the proudest of empires, which are scattered all about Constantine and Tunisia, all carefully excavated by the French, with a museum attached. Lambesi is small and unimportant in comparison with Timgad. From there the road climbs up to Marcouna along a pretty valley with a river. At Marcouna there is a fine triumphal arch of the time of Marcus Aurelius. It looks very majestic standing alone near the road. From Marcouna the road drops in a series of long zigzags, and Timgad lies before you. Built on a sloping hill with high mountains, snow-capped and craggy, behind it, it is a wonderful sight. Its streets and houses are in perfect form, excepting that the houses are all roofless. It must have been a town of some importance from its size and its opulence of building. It seems that very little is known about it excepting that it was founded by Trajan, A.D. 100. It went through vicissitudes of war upon war, until it was finally overthrown and sacked by the Vandals during the wars of repression led by Justinian and his generals against the native popula-

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

tion, who had wrested the country from the Romans two centuries before under Genseric. Justinian massacred the inhabitants and the country was plunged into misery. And in such a plight did the Arabs find it after the devastating waves of Vandals and Romans and the destructive small wars between the different Christian churches for five centuries.

And it was their hand which was again to raise the lamp of learning and culture in this tortured community.

Earthquakes finished the extinction of Timgad, which was entirely buried until its discovery and excavation, towards the end of the nineteenth century, by the Archæological Society of France. Its plan is a rectangular square with a broad flag-paved road from east to west down the centre to the great Triumphal Arch of Trajan, a magnificent pile of arches and Corinthian columns, with great bays in which stood huge statues, the remains of which are for the most part in the museum.

Under the main road runs a mountain stream which acted as a drain to the city. The pavement shows the mark of chariot wheels, and one can imagine them thundering up the street. The echo of the horses' hoofs and cries of the charioteers seem to linger in this dead monument of magnificent and artistic luxury.

There are bath-houses with the basement from which they were heated, promenades, cold rooms, dressing-rooms: all telling the tale of a by-gone civilization whose senses ran riot, whose luxurious indulgence in pleasure and art was unbounded.

The Forum, with its imposing columns, stands to the north; not far from it is a small Christian church and baptistry. Temples, bath-houses, residential houses, a

# Timgad

great theatre, the Capitol, all stand as they were originally built. The pillars of various rich marbles with carven capitals, places of amusement with tables of stone bewilder the eye. From the top of the wall of the theatre one can get a perfect view of the whole majestic ruin. The height of the pillars and the grandeur of its conception is almost fantastic. As the sun set and the shadows lengthened, an air of inscrutable mystery seemed to enshroud it.

A noticeable feature of the place is that no wood was used in its construction, even the tables and seats are of stone. There was no wood there, nor is there now. The distant cedar forests of the Atlas Mountains was one source of the wood they used for heating and cooking. It is so poignant to see the burnt smoke-discoloured stones of the fireplaces. It makes the inhabitants and their lifetime seem recent and real.

On one of the tables—or benches, I forget which—is an inscription in Latin characteristic of the life and attitude of these super-cultured people.

To hunt, to bathe, to play, to laugh, this is life !

On these curved seats in the sunshine sat youths and maidens to whom the things of their world doubtless seemed as enduring as ours. They were victorious, splendid and they loved and lived and died, and thought theirs was an enduring empire. When the empire began to totter to its fall, and the garrison was overpowered and the town finally sacked, were there none to tell the tale ? It does not appear to have been chronicled.

Do the shades of these forgotten heroes and victims lie in the shadows, watching and dreaming, as we guess at their end and wonder at their greatness ?

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

It was not until some time after Trajan and the founding of Thamugade (Timgad's own name) that the Roman empire actually consolidated their empire through North Africa.

The Romans brought Christianity into Africa, where it spread apace. The pagan inhabitants welcomed it, and Africa was, after a time, more intrinsically Christian than the European side of the empire.

Some of the Church's earliest celebrities belong to North Africa : Tertullian, St. Augustine, and St. Cyprian (martyred about the middle of the third century).

The pagan inhabitants did not persecute the Christian members of their population regularly or unprovoked. Like the Moslems of later history, tolerance was the rule rather than the exception. Anyhow, the Christian Church in Africa was torn up and disseminated, before its entire subjugation and disappearance with the coming of the hordes of Vandals, by such internal disputes and heresies that their persecution of each other appears from impartial points of view as more severe and fanatical than any it and its fragments suffered at pagan hands.

Timgad lay forgotten for centuries as she slept the death-sleep brought to her by Time. Exhumed from her grave, she sleeps now in the clear sunshine. Flowers grow on her pavements and hang their garlands from her pillared arches.

## Chapter 7      Batna to Constantine

**B**ATNA offers no attractions as far as we could see. It is a modern town, dating from 1844, when the French had a military camp there when settling and conquering the country with the object of protecting this route through the Tell and to the Sahara. It is a good example of the well-planned French town, with its rectangular wide roads planted with trees, its buildings solid and practical, utterly devoid of romance or picturesqueness.

It was very cold. The *patronne* of the inn told us it was very cold in winter and very hot in the summer. It is high on the plateau and open to wind and storm.

We left Batna at nine o'clock. A perfect morning—our spirits were high as we left the ugly streets behind and saw the road before us like a ribbon stretching for miles. Between flat cultivated tracts, with mountains to the right and left, it ran. The crops were just getting green. The peach and almond blossom lay in the soft light between the bluest of mountains and the tender green of the young crops.

The road was very interesting. This upland or plateau stretches as far as Constantine. At intervals it winds through the passes of small ranges of hills which look like barriers as you approach and open again on to the plateau. The railway climbs up on to this plateau. It



## Through Algeria and Tunisia

goes under tunnels for a good part of the way, but it climbs up the 2,500 feet; its engines arrive puffing and clanking to dispel the dream-like quiet of the beautiful valleys and prairies and mountains.

Every time we came through the narrower precincts of the passes through the hills it seemed more beautiful, and about noon we found ourselves still at an altitude of 2,400 feet, on the banks of a lake. On a day like that, with blue sky, banks of clouds and clear atmosphere, it was wonderful. Its unruffled surface reflected the mountains that rise from its shores as in a mirror. We climbed on a little eminence for a better view, to find another lake to the west of us; but not so beautiful, as it is smaller and has no mountains to mirror.

The railway passes near here. These lakes are salt and are exploited for the production of salt. I do not know by what process; but there is no visible factory or other works to spoil their exquisite beauty. There was no wind here, which was such a relief. From Batna for the first two hours we had had a buffeting. It was all right for the passenger in the side-car, but the poor pilot's face was half frozen and his hands numbed. Also the wind impeded our progress, and to every one who is driving an engine this is a horrible thought that jaundices the brightest outlook to the muddiest yellow. We feasted our eyes on the lakes and mountains, and went on through the sweet, fresh day enjoying every minute. The kilometre stones sped by us, and at noon we had done just under a hundred, and *déjeuner* at Constantine seemed to be an absolute certainty. We were coming down now, and the road was certainly bumpy and rather cut up. After about two miles in and out of ruts and pot-holes—a



## Batna to Constantine

grinding crash and a slight shock disturbed the even tenor of my pleasant reflections.

P. didn't hear ; but my frenzied cries of "Stop ! stop !" at last penetrated through the chug, chug of the engine, and there it was ! Broken side-car springs, and only eighteen kilometres from the end of our journey ! Wasn't it bad luck ? It was our first mishap, and we felt as though a trusty friend had betrayed us.

What to do ? We could see the town of Kroub not far away, and we knew there was a railway station there.

Only six kilometres ! Not a long walk on a perfect day, so I quite cheerfully prepared to walk it while P. brought in the machine to Constantine by road. From Kroub I could get a train to Constantine, we knew.

Just as we had decided, we heard a noise like a traction engine working while a cart-load of bricks is being discharged, and round a corner came a splendid conveyance. It was a sort of car, but it looked as if Mr. Heath Robinson had designed it in a nightmare.

There were three people and lots of luggage in it. They stopped to ask if we needed any help. This was something new ; it isn't done out there as a rule. It was driven by a French farmer in his working-clothes. Its other occupants were a young girl in smart attire, and a lad who was referred to as Michel. When I said I was going to walk, the man said that to walk six kilometres was not a possibility, and that Michel should hang on to the outside of the machine if I would take his seat on a packing-case inside. This I did most gratefully. With a fearsome grinding and clanging we were off down the steep incline. If he had any brakes he did not use them, neither did he look at the road. He discoursed to me of his business

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

of farming, waving his hands about : I'm sure he sometimes waved both hands at once.

As we reached the bottom he told me that his car was a splendid goer on level roads and down hills, but that there was a certain element of chance about her climbing up hill.

Slower we went and slower. Dreadful noises came from her interior. Suddenly he yelled "Pompe, Michel ! Pompe ! Pompe !" and Michel, hanging on with one hand, reached in to a little handle and wrenched it up and down in a frenzy. His face was purple and his attitude most precarious. Still old man farmer said "Pompe ! Pompe !" and at last we breasted the hill. Michel sank exhausted on to the step, and we clattered and sobbed down the steep to the outskirts of Kroub. He put me down before the bottom of the hill, with many apologies at not taking me into the town, because "we dare not to stop on an ascent, you understand," and there I was. In a cloud of dense blue vapour they slowly went from my ken as in a dream.

To find breakfast and to find out about trains was my next thought.

As I entered the town the inhabitants came out to look at me. I had quite a following by the time I reached the station and they stood round the door of the *estaminet* and gaped at me in apparent wonder. I felt quite hot and bothered, and asked the *patronne* the reason. She said the whole town was full of curiosity to see me arrive apparently on foot from nowhere ! "Une dame seule," no luggage, no companion ; it was, she said, "incroyable." There had been no train—she, herself, could only wonder ; but "these English" they are so unexpected and astonish-

## Batna to Constantine

ing! I explained. I don't think she believed me. She gave me a disgusting meal, and two smelly dogs sat on either side. They smelt like a pigsty and nothing would move them. The *patronne* said "that the poor things always sat thus, people gave them food. Without food one dies, even if one is a dog!" And she sighed as she set before me a stew of pig's tongue, on which I reflected that even with food death might seem probable. Preferring hunger to dissolution, I fed *les pauvres chiens*, and assuaged my own pangs with bread.

The train to Constantine, they had told me, left at 2.30. After an hour had passed and P. had not come, I began to wonder if some further accident had delayed him. But he arrived about three-quarters of an hour before my train was due to go, a series of accidents, punctures and spokes loose, and so on, had delayed him.

He called for *déjeuner*, and before my very eyes that perfidious woman, who had regaled me with pig's tongue, set for his delectation sardines, olives, little wild pig, custard and fruit. Words failed me. I tried looking at her with offensive intent; she only smiled and said that she thought Monsieur looked fatigued. At that moment I heard a movement in the station and rushed off to find the train preparing to depart without me; twenty minutes before the time they had told me.

The porter or station-master, whoever the vacant-looking idiot was, said that it always went at the same hour, and he didn't know why I should mind! With the air of royalty conferring a distinction he gave me a ticket and I just got to the carriage in time!

Surely these trains are the slowest on record? Over

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

an hour it took to reach Constantine, only twelve kilometres.

P. got there first, and finding no room at the best hotel had arranged for us at the "Grand." Good rooms, no baths, and the drains one's nose declared must be wanting. The *patronne* was kind and anxious to please and really, excepting for the two above-mentioned drawbacks, it was pleasant enough.

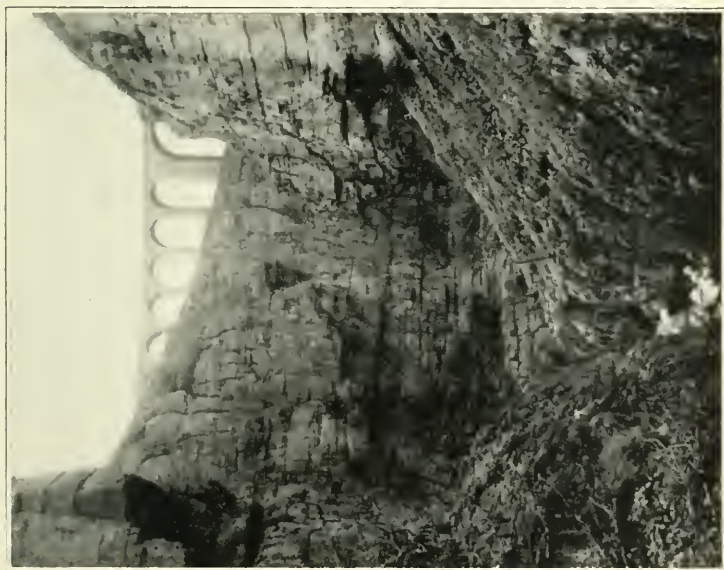
A friendly custom prevailed by which the waiters dined and lunched in the same room as the guests. We being late, were served by people who, before replying to a question, either chewed and swallowed hastily, or pushed the last mouthful into the cheek, where it bulged like a toothache and rendered their utterance thick and spasmodic.

Outside the door of the *salle à manger* was a sort of basin; looked like a large holy water apparatus. The public stop there and comb their hair and beards in front of the glass above it, and perform ablutions. Very thorough some of them were, rinsing the mouth and even doing a gentle gargle.

The food was excellent and the waiter a charming fellow with plenty of conversation. In the afternoon we wandered among the shops and arranged with a *carrossier* for the mending of the springs, promised the next day but one.

It is a very extraordinary town, built on the site of the Roman town of Ceres. The site is a square, rocky plateau, which is about 1,800 feet high, rising abruptly on all sides and literally cut in half by a chasm, at the bottom of which is a stream. There is a drive—a *corniche* drive round the plateau cut in the rocky cliffs, from whose





STONE BRIDGE OVER THE GORGE AT CONSTANTINE.



SWEETMEAT SELLER AT TIZI OUZOU.





## Batna to Constantine

precipitous edge one can see the magnificent views from all sides.

The ravine is spoilt by *Tourisme*, by saw-mills and the truly terrible cascades which apparently, from different orifices in the face of the cliffs, bring the town drainage to the river.

For the most part the cliffs are perpendicular, from the walls of the hotels and houses, which appear from the river bed to be hanging over the edge, to the bottom. In parts it is only just short of 1,000 feet from the town to the river.

It is bridged three times. Just where the ravine opens on to the plain a suspension bridge hangs like a thread about 700 feet above the river bed. The plateau ends abruptly just beyond it, the cliffs of the ravine forming a scarp either side. From its giddy height one is suspended in space. The Clifton suspension bridge is a baby to it. One very unique point is that the ravine it spans ends, so the bridge is, as it were, the top of a great arch at whose base the river enters the open plain.

There is the remains of a massive Roman bridge underneath the present iron bridge over the gorge, about the centre of the plateau. At the southern end there is a curved arched stone viaduct, whose airy arches carry the road from the Arab quarter of Sidi Rachel. Its central arch is 210 feet wide, its height 300 feet.

To see the ravine, its thermal springs, its waterfalls, bluffs and Roman fish-pond, one travels along a precarious looking path, *le chemin des Touristes*. For the most part it is a shelf of planks laid on iron brackets driven into the stone cliff; it is about two feet wide, and has a hand-rail about three feet high. It is perfectly safe—

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

but feels most precarious when one treads on loose boards, steps over broken ones, or bends to pass under jutting rocks.

As a matter of fact, it is rather an enterprise, and justifies its existence in the charge of two francs per head to tourists for its use.

When we came up the Arab quarter looked interesting, with its tumbled higgledy-piggledy heaps of houses.

Storks preparing the nursery graced most of the roofs. Glimpses of little side streets promised picturesque wanderings.

At the hotel we asked for a guide. The waiter said he would be our guide, and with our permission he would take us to see his home and his wife. This surprised me till he told us that he was a Khabyle and a naturalized French subject. Any Arab or Khabyle may become naturalized on payment of a fee. It is not usual, because in so doing a Moslem cuts himself off from the laws of the Koran.

He took us to his little home. A room, off a courtyard surrounded with rooms, every one of which seemed to be inhabited by a family. In this clean, small stone place, with whitewashed walls, this young man and his wife, newly-wed, seemed to have a sentimental existence.

In an alcove a French double bedstead of the patriarchal age gleamed in brazen glory. On a raised step at the other end a chest stood. Against the wall a sort of bureau. These were all their *lares et penates*.

The wife was out. He showed us the contents of the chest. Clothes, embroideries and lace-worked curtains, etc., were in it. At one side, linen embroidery all worked by his wife. He gave me a queer little blue silk pillow

## Batna to Constantine

embroidered in prickly gold, which he assured me was just the thing to put under one's cheek or chin as one rested.

Constantine is a very energetic town, the people really move and seem to have business. Feather work and linen manufacture are the principal industries. She has a great trade with the interior, and her industries keep well to the fore, in spite of the influx of European commodities of latter times.

As Certā, she was of Phœnician birth, and came through many hands before, in 50 B.C., she was given as a reward by the Cæsar of the then growing Roman empire to an Italian soldier, and was for several centuries the capital of a province, a rich city and centre of trade and culture.

Certa was destroyed about the beginning of the fourth century, and rose again to take the place of the fallen town of Cæsarea as Constantine and capital of the Roman province of Constantine, which name and status she has kept through all the changes of the ages. Romans, Arabs, Turks, pirates, Spaniards, all had their turn in the conquest or attempt at conquest and disturbing of this province.

In the sixteenth century Constantine became a separate province or kingdom under an independent Dey, and so remained until the conquest by the French, after several unsuccessful efforts, in 1848.

During its existence as a kingdom under a Dey for these three-and-a-half centuries it was disturbed by frequent internal insurrections and by external interference and attempts at coercion. The Berber tribes were taxed by the Dey governor almost out of existence, to maintain which they retired to their mountains, and so maintained a sort of independence. Intermarriage, and trade to some extent, as ever, rendered the line of demarcation

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

between the various races of decreasing clearness. The Dey's government drew its funds from taxation, from piracy, and also from the subsidies paid by European Powers as the price of peaceful navigation in the Mediterranean. This recurring bargaining for what was never attained up to recent days is an amazing feature of the history of those who feared the pirates and tried to placate them.

The province of Constantine, as it now is, is French territory. Its natural productiveness is limited by climatic vagaries, and the visitations of locusts which from time to time devastate the crops.

There are tremendous deposits of iron, easily got at in many places. There are whole hills of it from which it can be got by merely blasting and excavating.

Until recently the French Government, fearing competition in European markets with their own iron, would not give concessions for the railways, without which the working of iron deposits was impossible at these distances and altitudes. However, lately these railway concessions have been granted, and works started. Apparently it was realized that the iron found in Algeria is of a kind or quality different from that of France, and its commercial value only competes with Scandinavian iron ore.

Later on in our tour we passed through a tract of country and saw the jagged iron-yielding mountains on the western side of the province.

We had to stay in Constantine two days, leaving the third day in the most bitter cold weather.

Constantine, the town, was perhaps the most interesting of all the French towns, in that its scenery is unique, its population so varied, and it seemed so much more alive than other towns.

## Chapter 8            Constantine to Ain Beida and Tebessa

THE cold was horrible the day we left Constantine. The delays over the springs and spokes of the car had been exasperating. Promises, which must have been made without any idea of keeping faith, and (last straw of all) the fact that some workman had locked up our impedimenta and gone off elsewhere, were two causes of our pessimism, added to the cold.

The garage system is very confusing, and until you grasp the idea that every workman is on his own, and the *patron* is only the owner of a garage, most exasperating. The *patron* is, at all events in the places we dealt with, in no way responsible for the work or the workmen. The unmoved countenance of a *patron* confronted by the empurpled visage of an outraged customer is thus largely explained. I must say that the charges are always extremely moderate.

So we went off in a bright sun, but with a head wind that cut like a knife and kept us back.

I find various ill-tempered scribbles in my note-book on this date: "Why am I such an idiot?" "First chance I get I'll leave this d—— 'bus' and go to Tebessa by train," etc., etc.



# Through Algeria and Tunisia

I had suggested to P. to go straight to Tunis and see if the weather were better there.

"When we stop for breakfast I'll leave it," is another ebullition of temper and disenchantment.

P. was taciturn and our start was decidedly gloomy.

Gloom gave way to temper and despair when we discovered the side-car tyre to be completely deflated about five miles out.

There was one of the faults of the garages. Constantly we found careless work of this sort.

Punctures were said to have been mended, but inspection, when the tyre was off, showed that it had been impossibly badly done.

The road was in an awful state of mud and altogether the gilt was temporarily off the gingerbread.

The village idiot came out to see the fun with a few children. Their appearance was truly disgusting, demonstrating that even a bad cold in the head can have its way without apparent discomfort. They closed round us and snuffled and gibbered. Their naturally unprepossessing appearance was heightened by the ugliest sort of *burnous*—coats. The sleeves were put on about the waist at right angles to the side of the coat, so that they stuck straight out each side, giving the wearers a helpless look, rather like penguins. The likeness to those clumsy birds was heightened by the fact that the garment hung to the feet, which latter were worn very much turned in and bare.

They stood flapping and hopping round us, and, our sense of humour having become slightly atrophied in the process of getting under way over all the obstacles, we spoke roughly to them. French was no use. We



## Constantine to Ain Beida and Tebessa

proudly used one of the three words of Arabic which we had acquired for such emergencies. The one we used meant "Go away," and the tone in which we said it implied a long and fateful journey. We pronounced it several ways (it is such a pity I forget the word now!) and they only gazed and snuffled. The village idiot, a young man of strange aspect, slowly sat him down and, gathering the penguins to his bosom, began a kind of chanting narrative. Whether he was telling them what to think of two ill-tempered tourists and their comic conveyance, or whether he was relating some fairy story to distract their minds from a sight so degradingly suggesting hard work as we presented, I could not make up my mind.

Anyhow, they had some kind of magic at their command, for the valve-cap of the punctured wheel disappeared as it were before our eyes.

Our proposed itinerary this day of misfortune was to be from Constantine to Tebessa, over 200 kilometres, more than 120 miles. A long run even with luck and good weather.

After we had got under way and left the penguins, the road became very monotonous as it rose to the uplands. Extraordinary craggy eminences rose from a rocky looking plateau. The strata of the crags and rocks all along was amazing in its evidence of the action of earthquakes in determining the character of the scenery. Through a winding pass we went, with steep zigzag road, with twists and turns on the straighter bits and the sharpest of hairpin bends. It got colder as we mounted. At one point the road touches 1,000 metres (3,000 feet). Noon found us entering Canrobert, less than 100 kilo-

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

metres from our starting-point, leaving us about 120 still to do. I seem to remember it as a desolate-looking spot, with salt lakes or deposits. If it had been heaven I should have failed to see its beauties. All we could want to see was food and much of it, and wine and warmth! We found food and wine in a room with a flagged floor and an open door.

After our repast we were able to realize the grandeur of the scenery, with the mountains to the south, desolation and solitude. Soon after we started it began to rain and hail. The wind blew in our teeth and we began to feel more than cross. We were exhausted and chilled to the bone. After twelve kilometres of baddish road over the wind-swept plain, with the hail beating in our faces, we made Ain Beida and decided to give up the idea of getting to Tebessa that day.

The hotel is what the *Guide Bleu* describes as *modeste*, which, being translated to meet the fact, would be rendered "impossible" except to those travellers who, like ourselves, took any port in a storm.

It was shelter and, moreover, there was a stove in the centre of the great barn-like *salle*, with its flagged floor. People of very primitive manners were seated around it. The French verb *cracher* so very well describes the French way of doing it. It is much more descriptive than our simple verb; the American use of the four-syllabled word of same meaning is descriptive, but *cracher*—well, it is just *the* expression! It implies an explosion—a cataclysm—a completeness!

I didn't feel very well in these surroundings. I don't go in for being squeamish: but what with the atmosphere redolent of humanity, wet with rain, steaming as they

## Constantine to Ain Beida and Tebessa

dried, the Algerian cigarette smoke, the piercing odour of onions, and the inhabitants' habits, it was very trying.

Three pleasant girls were waiting and gave us water, with which I made tea.

Presently one of them asked if it would please us to go to a Jewish wedding. They were going. It was a rich wedding and *tout le monde* was invited. Of course we accepted. After an interval these waitresses, who did their duties in short check skirts, cross-over plaid shawls, hair scratched back in a tight knot, and thick clumsy shoes, appeared in the neatest of costumes, high-heeled shoes, smart hats and gloves, and off we went in their company.

I have never seen a Jewish wedding in any country, and this had features which made it interesting and quite unintentionally amusing. The church—or synagogue, as I suppose it was—was square and *crowded*. However, we found seats kept for us and our hostesses near the sort of alcove in which presently the bride and bridegroom would stand for the ceremony. Behind us, near the door, was a sort of enclosed dais upon chairs in which sat the quaintest collection of old women. These were the aged women of the families about to be united by this marriage. They were dressed in the semi-oriental dress which I was told was always worn by Jewesses at the probable time of their childhood. Flowing brightly-hued skirts of rich brocades, and silks, short-waisted tight-fitting bodices buttoned up the centre of the front, with bright buttons, quaint gold chains, rings and brooches, bright scarves or shawls worn fichu-like, and silk folded head-dresses, is the catalogue in my note-book describing their appearance.

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

The rest of the congregation were mixed Arabs, Jews, French, Spaniards, Italians and half-breeds, all talking and with a sort of holiday spirit. Presently a rabbi entered, followed by a choir of boys with Arab voices—full and brazen—chanting an oriental chant of semitones and changing cadences. The roof seemed likely to lift with the sound.

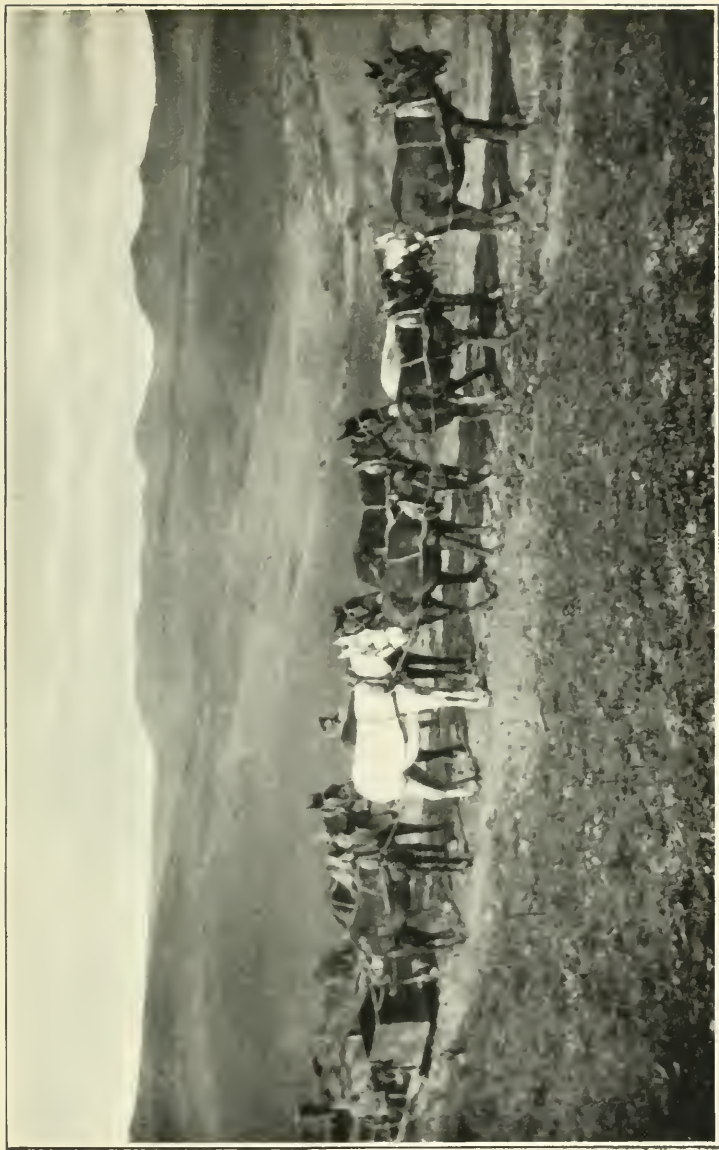
Amidst the noise and orientalism of the entire scene arrived the bride and bridegroom.

She wore a white and silver wedding dress, shoes and stockings. He was in a very French frock-coat, etc., and upon his curly black shock of hair sat a wonderful top hat. Its brim had such a curve, its surface such a shine! It sat precariously, it seemed, rather on one side. They stepped into the alcove and were immediately invested in a kind of drapery of silk and lace over their heads, so that they were in a sort of canopy supported by their heads and hanging round them as they stood with clasped hands.

There was then more chanting and a little talking by the rabbi.

As he stopped he reached out his hand towards a man who I had noticed struggling with a very large sort of magnum bottle of wine. His face was scarlet, and he had sent appealing glances round the spectators. Now I realized. It was part of the ceremony, and he had no corkscrew! The bottle was passed from hand to hand, while a sort of acolyte gazed hopelessly at the glasses he held, one a huge goblet, the other an ordinary claret glass. At last some one had done something and the wine was poured in the two glasses.

In the meanwhile the young couple were getting so



ROAD ROLLER DRAWN BY MULES.





## Constantine to Ain Beida and Tebessa

dishevelled and hot and bothered under that blessed canopy that threatened to push his hat off and would catch in her hair.

Now the small glass was handed to the bridegroom, who gave her to drink, drank himself and broke the glass.

More chanting, a little more discourse, and the knot was tied.

As we turned to go out we saw that the big glass was being circulated through the crowd, every one taking a sip! It seemed a very dreadful idea, and we escaped. Every one also was kissing the bride.

It was really very interesting, and when we got back to the inn half the world and his wife were there, drinking cognac and gossiping and—well, I've said enough about that!

I went up to see our bedrooms. Truly wonderful are some of the ways of our simpler friends.

A wooden ladder led up to a balcony round a courtyard. On to the balcony opened the cave-like rooms, each with a mountainous feather bed and dingy sheets and blankets. Cold! ye gods! Looking over the balcony to the courtyard, which was about sixty feet square, one observed a rural scene such as Mr. and Mrs. Noah must have inaugurated in the ark, but, in their case, of necessity. Of every kind of domestic beast there appeared to be several, "each after his own kind." Goats, pigs, fowls, ducks, geese and dogs. Upon most of the projections of roofs and balustrade sat little cats. All these people appeared to have lived there for a very long time. I never saw such magnificent geese! None of these creatures appeared to have legs. They seemed to lie legless on their bellies upon a bed of soft squelchy

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

manure. Through a door at one side one saw the kitchen and clouds of blue wood smoke poured through the orifice and mixed its misty breath with the other smells. The only window in the bedrooms opened on to the balcony over this yard. We did not say anything. We returned to the *salle*. I wrote the above description in my note-book and thought with grateful, wistful thoughts of the dak bungalow or rest house of Indian sojourn. Gunga Din or Ramaswami may secretly boil the pudding in portions of his raiment, strain the tea through a sock, and keep a little menagerie, but it is all delicately out of sight at all events! And as I remembered how often he had been cursed for dirt and disorderly service, I reflected that it is difficult to realize when one is well off.

The *patronne* was a sweet old woman who sat knitting and talking to the *clientèle* of the inn in an old-fashioned manner which, with her fine small-featured face, with serene eyes and grey flattened hair, was attractive.

Of course one *has* to go to bed, and we did. It was very grim. Next day and for several bathless days did I think of the Frenchman who said of these creatures, "Je n'aime pas le pique—mais le promenade! Je le detest."

My note-book is silent until Tebessa. Only two remarks. "Road excellent. Just before Tebessa, after whirling down a wriggling zigzag, taking us 900 feet down in fifteen miles, P. said, 'Done twenty-five miles *all* the way; if it had not been for the stony bits it might have been thirty!'"

We covered the 86 kilometres, fifty miles, in two hours, and found ourselves in Tebessa, where we nearly had to stay for ever under the orders of a conscientious little



TIMGAD.



ROMAN RUINS AT TEBESSA.

*Face p. 92.*



## Constantine to Ain Beida and Tebessa

man with a slim face, brown eyes and a long beard, who, finding our passes for the customs (triptych, etc.) remarkable for their absence, said that we could not go on! This was damping. We left him feeling a little bit defeated. Worse disappointment befell us after *déjeuner*. I do not think that I have mentioned our bright idea, which was to fall off the edge of this upland on to the desert steppes and travel by a route which was marked as a *piste* (track) to Gafsa, into Tunisia. This road, although but a track, was said to be passable and so we were hoping to go that way. Our time being short we wanted to do Lekef, Kasserine, Gafsa, Sfax, Khairowan, El Dhem, Sousse, Tunis, instead of going to Tunis first and so on to Khairowan.

Our hopes were dashed, as the *piste*, it seems, passes through many ravines with rivers, and is not bridged. The recent rains made it impassable, they said, the sickening thing being that there was only about fifteen kilometres impassable. There it was! We got out the maps and felt drawn to some place where one might find a bath.

The *piques* and the *promenades* were getting on our nerves. In the length and breadth of Algeria there seems no hotel with baths, hot and cold, nearer than Alger itself, until I read "Hammam Meskoutine, Thermal Establishment." This seemed good. The road looked good on the map. So we decided to go as far as Souk Ahras that day. After a little agreeable conversation about the Roman remains, and so on, the conscientious gentleman allowed us to depart in peace, and we got off about three o'clock with only about thirty-five kilometres to Souk Ahras. It was a fine afternoon, and we felt that

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

with such a short run we should really be in before dark. However, we had the bad luck to miss the way. The road forked about ten miles from Tebessa, the sign-post, as we found several times, pointed with a fine impartiality between the two, and we took the wrong one! It twisted and turned between hills and over little rivers. The hills were an extraordinary formation—most picturesque—masses of pinnacled rocks looking like battlemented towered fortresses. We were entranced, we took photographs, and as we got on with no obstacles or mishaps, and a good surface road, felt very happy. Our first misgivings arose when we realized that there were no milestones. We put that right by thinking of the newness of the road. When, however, it suddenly ceased to be a road at all, we realized that the worst had happened. The sun was talking of setting, and we had sped along the alluring surface for twenty kilometres. Retracing our route meant forty kilometres wasted, and Souk Ahras for the night an impossibility.

So sadly we turned, with no idea where we should pass the night which was so quickly descending upon us.

We were in an absolutely deserted part of the world. We saw some villainous-looking men who doubtless were, in reality, respectable citizens of France. They were entirely unsympathetic and, speaking as the wise speak to fools, told us that the road led to the iron mines and nowhere else.

They worked in the iron mines and they gave one the idea, without uttering a word on the subject, that it was a dog's life. When we got back on the main road, it was dusk. Our only hope was the next village, about twenty kilometres on, where there was a railway station.



## Constantine to Ain Beida and Tebessa

When we got there we realized that we had by no means yet touched bottom as regards discomfort and uncertainty. A railway station Clarefontaine has. A refreshment room is its sole accommodation. The people were surly and were the first we had met who had just no use for us at all. After a real struggle we got a shed to put the machine into. And we sat in the refreshment room wondering what we could do. Nothing to eat would be served until the train came in. The room was unclean, with dirty tables. Everything looked truly squalid.

Every one looked at us as though we were some long expected enemy.

An Arab soldier sat at one of the two long tables writing. At intervals a dirty-looking girl and a saturnine-looking man came in to perform the minor duties of such a place.

We were told after some time that we could have bedrooms in the village, which was something. After a long time we were taken to see these.

Down a narrow street we went, just a lamp or two here and there.

We came to a row of whitewashed buildings, and behold each was a one-roomed house. We each took one. They were too quaint. Flagged floors, a door, a tiny window, a high feather bed and a table! All other beds had been white, clean and pure by comparison.

The door opened right on to the street and the rooms were about ten feet square and oozy damp. It really made me feel that even sleep was dear at a price. We dumped our belongings and returned to partake of a repulsive meal in company with a train-load of natural curiosities. The train stops half-an-hour for the passengers who are foolish enough to feed here.

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

Our host became affable, and under the influence of cognac, quite expansive.

He asked us if we were travelling for sewing machines or agricultural machinery.

He was threatened with suffocation when we said neither.

He held his breath so long that his eyes appeared about to pop from their sockets. When he let out the chestful of breath he had drawn in suddenly, it was like a gale out of a distillery. He said that only commercial travellers, miners and engineers stopped at Clarefontaine. He was quite interested to find we were plain tourists.

He told us that the next day the Governor of Constantine was coming to open the light railway, which was just completed, to the adjacent iron mines. The hills, he said, were just solid bumps of ore sticking out of the earth.

When we departed for our caves for the night, we asked for hot water. Again he held his breath till apoplexy was threatened. This time I got away in safety before he let go.

A goods train was in the siding. "Bien," he said, "I will get a little from the engine." It was hot, in a nice big can, but it was also oily and had coal dust in it!

We comforted ourselves with the prospect of the thermal establishment at Hammam Meskoutine on the morrow. I dreamed of the poster of that gold dust that—

Kills moths.  
Kills beetles.  
Kills——

I don't think it does really—not if the climate is good and their constitution strong.

## Constantine to Ain Beida and Tebessa

Our breakfast of hard-boiled eggs and bread was taken to bed with us, for in Clarefontaine no one cooks in the morning. We made our own tea and ate the food with our fingers off newspapers on the stone window-ledge as a table. And shook the dust of Clarefontaine from our feet at 8.30.

Panting and puffing we flew off, thinking of hot water, proper meals and a real hotel to be our lot as soon as we could cover the 150 kilometres between us and Hammam Meskoutine. One rather narrow escape we had, illustrative of the care that is taken of the traveller. Going pretty fast, I noticed a tiny little sign-board. Suddenly I was curious and stopped. It read, "Attention! la route est coupée." So it was, a little bridge just ahead, whose coping and so on looked all right, was not there at all when you looked. A *détour* over a sort of ploughed field was necessary here. But still we held our heads high and sang with joy of anticipation of the day's ending at Hammam Meskoutine.

## Chapter 9      Hammam Meskoutine and Bone

**I**T is rather a wonderful road from Clarefontaine to Souk Ahras, Guelma and Hammam Meskoutine. Over uplands, through narrow passes, with sudden descents and ascents winding in and out of rocky hills until one climbs a very beautiful range of pine-clad hills. This ascent was very long, and we went down as often as up at first, and when we reached the top a wonderful plain lay before us. After traversing that we came down the side of a steep valley, with Souk Ahras looking rather wonderful high above on the other side of it.

Reaching Souk Ahras without mishap, we had breakfast and started off as soon as we could.

Souk Ahras, Thagaste of ancient days, was the country of St. Augustine.

Through mountains and woods it was so beautiful I felt it such a pity we never had time to stop and enjoy some of the wonderful views. These were of such variety that one's brain reels at the memory.

The road we took, about fifteen miles out of Souk Ahras, was the steepest we had ever done. I have never imagined a road that could wind without ever being straight for more than a few yards. The worst of it was that as we went on the more apparent it became that it was not a main road.

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No milestones showed us where we were going. It was very narrow and quite unguarded. The corners, which were so frequent, hardly had room for us to get round upon. After about twelve miles of this, we were wondering what would happen when it really did end ! and P. said he supposed we must go back. I declared with firmness that I'd live right there rather than go back, and I felt sure I saw on the side of the opposite hill a road on to which the track into which our road had developed debouched. It was so. Next day a chauffeur showed me a map. We turned to the right about five miles before a town called Ain Tahameraine, where the real road goes through Villar. The road we took is not meant for motor traffic, it is a short cut which joins the proper road at Villar. After this the road to Guelma was, while wild and wonderful, not of the narrowness and hair-raising steepness of the one we began on. Having come safely through, I looked upon it as a very good mischance, for the scenery was wonderful on the wrong road.

We went right down to the bottom of the deep ravine-like valley, whose rocky sides were in places sheer cliffs, round the buttresses of which the road wound.

The road had just been metalled. No car could get down it, there would be no room for it to get round the narrow corners. "Très accidentée avec les coudes extremes," says the *Guide Bleu*, of this sort of road, and of better ones !

A very picturesque sight we saw was a great road roller drawn by five pairs of mules.

We seemed to be at one time enclosed in high cliffs and pointed hills. Olives and vines, flowers of all kinds, and neat little farmsteads made up the landscape in the foreground when we got out of the gorges.

When we arrived at Guelma it was too late to see the

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Amphitheatre and other ruins—and we were rather tired too. The night before at Clarefontaine in our caves had not been very restful.

Between Guelma and Hammam Meskoutine there is a part of the road which shakes like a jelly on a sort of slope of mud. There is a notice at the end of it (the end we were on *after* going over it !) to say that it is dangerous to passengers !

It has probably slipped into the river again by now !

Hammam Meskoutine sprang upon us from round a corner at about five o'clock.

There, walking towards us, looking so clean and refreshing to us, who hadn't seen a very clean, well-dressed person since we left Biskra; was Mr. L. H., who gave us tea under the orange trees and a sympathetic ear to our joys and sorrows.

I began to get lazy and luxurious after a few hours in the very pleasant hotel.

Really nice rooms, all opening on to a veranda facing a path shaded by trees, under which were inviting seats and tables. Beyond a garden of oranges and lemons, whose golden fruit among the glittering dark leaves were as a dream of lanterns in a forest. And, never to be forgotten, the baths ! The springs are sulphur. They have a peculiarity over the other sulphur springs which I have seen, in that the sulphur is left in deposit as the water flows, so that there is very little of that smell of ancient eggs so marked in waters of this kind as a rule.

In fact one of the interesting sights of the place is the rocky declivity over which the water flows. It is covered with a thick white deposit of sulphur so curiously formed as to look like deep boiling foam.

The baths, like most thermal baths, are sunk in the floor. They are made of marble, and are about  $7 \times 5$  feet, so one can



## Hamмам Meskoutine and Bone

have a real wallow. It is, of course, a regular business here. To our insular ways of thinking, it was amusing to see a couple of French people who had a room next to us. She came forth from her room attired in a bath-gown, with her hair down her back, accompanied by Monsieur carrying her towels, etc. On her return she sat in a *peignoir* on the veranda and he helped dry her hair. This devoted service was rendered and received with no sign of consciousness on the part of either of them that the audience were interested. By the time we had finished dinner I felt I could easily stay a week.

When I woke up in the beautiful bed and partook of coffee and rolls and butter and honey, served on a tray with a white embroidered cloth, I thought of the little strange places waiting for us with a distaste verging on hatred. When P. went to see how the "bus" was, I prayed that some evil might have befallen her, our little friend whom I really loved.

But no! he returned in an hour, hot and dirty, but happy.

We would leave this place of comfort after *déjeuner*. We would go now and see the subterranean lake and the scenery, have breakfast-lunch, and go off again. I could hardly bear the thought, but I agreed, knowing full well that even without mishap we should hardly complete our tour as far as Tunis. For, while El Dhem and Khairowan were rather fading, Gafsa, Sfax and other wonderful places had been abandoned for certain.

The subterranean lake is some distance from the hotel. I've never seen such flowers before or since. Giant asphodel, tall fluffy yellow stuff, cardinal red anemones, tiny iris, in patches upon a ground of tender green grass and rose and yellow blossom. Rocky craggy hills encompassed the route which the path led. Dark olives, light acacias and tamarind trees moved in the light wind. It was very hot.

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The subterranean lake is in itself disappointing. It is a cave where a subterranean river widens in its passage. It is a very sophisticated and *improved* natural wonder. The tourist expects things in order no doubt—but this seemed over done, moreover the effect was dirty and dull! It is a fine cave in itself.

It is a resort for people whose ailments need the waters and treatment. It is visited by tourists for the curious sight of the deposits of sulphur, the subterranean lake and the not far distant ruins of D'Annonna. These ruins are all that remains of an old Roman town. It is not in such good condition as many of these places, but it has a remarkable Byzantine church, an example of the success of the earlier missionary efforts of the Romans. We had no time to visit this place.

We sped from Hammam Meskoutine for Bone, seventy kilometres away, a nice short run and four hours' daylight. It looked quite easy!

The country between Hammam Meskoutine and Guelma is open. The colour of the willows was remarkable, the withies hung like golden rods from the bronze trunks.

We were pursued by dogs, who rushed out at us barking and jumping. They kept up with us until we touched thirty. It is extraordinary how fast they are. The road was bad in parts and the mended spring seemed weak; but we still hoped on!

Through Guelma once more. This is a considerable town with a French garrison. It is the site of a very ancient town, formerly named Calama. Its old Byzantine fortress has been restored and utilized as the walls of the garrison quarter. It is the centre of a fine cattle trade; the breed

## Hamмам Meskoutine and Bone

peculiar to this country is considered the best in Algeria and Tunisia.

After Guelma the road climbs up to the Col de Tedjoudji, 1,600 feet above sea level. At the top of this pass is a tall monument, but I have made no note as to what it commemorates. The view from here is truly wonderful over mountains and lakes, forests and river, to the sea.

The spring held out over some fairly bad bits until we got on to a straight road running like a line, with slight ascents and descents in long stretches. Bumping from one hole to another out of deep ruts on to heaps of stones, so we proceeded for twelve kilometres, arriving with both springs broken, and neither of us in the best temper at the prospect of delay in this very prosaic-looking town. However, it is not much use being exasperated even if one does arrive in a place on a Saturday with broken springs. We found a garage which promised us that everything should be ready by noon on Monday. It seemed a terribly long time, but there was nothing for it but to bow to fate and see what profit we could get out of our enforced sojourn.

The *Guide Bleu* extols it as a wonderful town on a wonderful site. With marvellous climate, a great commercial centre, an important seaport, etc.

It is all that ! There are a great many Jews, who apparently keep the greater part of the shops, which therefore were open on Sunday, and we made a few necessary purchases. Our waiter, who was a native of Malta and an Italian, constituted himself our guide and told us several things of interest. Amongst others that he was going to do his military service in England to escape its hardships in Constantine or France.

It is a queer place, the Hotel d'Orient. There are bath-

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rooms, relic of some bygone enterprise not quite so far back as the Roman period, but they are now furnished and let as bedrooms. I went to see one and, full of hope, suggested I could use it. The hot water part of its equipment was missing, so that was no good. The hotel looks on to a wonderful boulevard, the trees in the centre forming quite a wood. On Sunday the noisiest band that ever happened played for hours to a crowd that even the cold drizzling rain could not disconcert. The band-stand was almost opposite the hotel, so we got it in full blast.

I shall never know why we went to Bone, unless it was to get on to the coast road, which I suppose was the reason. The coast and the Chemin de la Corniche and the excursion to Cap la Garde are picturesque, and reconciled us in part to our enforced stay in Bone. We hired a decrepit old motor and plunged wildly along the precipitous narrow road with our Maltese waiter as cicerone. From the top of Cap la Garde the view along the coast is magnificent.

We walked along the beach part of the way home so as to take a little longer time over the expedition and keep away as long as possible from the town and the dismal amenities of the hotel.

So we whiled away Sunday and awoke bright and early on Monday with joyful anticipation of getting on.

It was raining and blowing, but we did not care. To get away—to get on—was all we asked.

That day, for the first time in our tour, I had difficulty about money.

I had always carried a certain amount and I had a circular letter with the *Crédit Lyonnais*. I had not used this very often, as Thos. Cook in Alger, and every one in Biskra had taken and cashed English cheques. At Constantine I had

# Hammam Meskoutine and Bone

changed a cheque at the *Crédit Lyonnais*. Knowing there was a branch office in Bone, I hadn't given the matter a thought until Monday morning, when I walked in with my letter of credit. I was told with no waste of courtesy that Bone was not on the list of branches at which my letter of credit was drawable.

I asked to see the manager who, with brusque off-handness, said I must go to Constantine or Tunis.

I explained to him that I could not leave Bone without paying the hotel and garage, and asked him if he would be kind enough to telephone to the branch at Constantine that he had seen my letter of credit and would they sanction his cashing my order upon it. At this his manner became quite fierce and firmer than ever as he refused to do anything at all. I left the office rather nonplussed till I thought me of the British Consul.

I found him after some little difficulty. I had often read and been told that a British Consul was nearly as puissant as Providence; but I had not realized the courtesy and helpfulness. I do not know what the inducements are to make men be consuls. It is a wonderful institution. I showed my passport and letter of credit, explained my difficulty, and in a few minutes all was arranged. Hotel bill, garage bill, and a few hundred francs for the road.

The main lesson to be gleaned from this experience and others I have had before and since, notably in the matter of fair exchange, is that there are good banks of the country, of which I think the best is "*Crédit foncier d'Algerie et Tunis*."

After this struggle I went to find P. The luggage was ready, our plans were settled, all we needed was the "bus."

Of this we had had no doubts. "Noon on Monday" for certain!



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Ah me ! I followed him to the garage : there lay the side-car on the floor minus the springs.

An absolutely indifferent workman said that they might be here at two o'clock. They had been sent to a *carrossier* far away. He couldn't say. Twelve o'clock, la ! but impossible !

Depressed and angry, back we went to breakfast.

Our next idea was the possibility of a boat to Tunis. There are many companies. It seemed a good idea, instead of spending so much of our short time in this benighted, disagreeable town. Train was another alternative. Well ! If anyone who reads this has ever failed to appreciate T. Cook, as I have often, let them go to a place where there is no T. Cook. Let us laugh at his "rubber-necks," his "tourists," his guides, but remember that without him, or his like, incredible difficulties are ready to pounce upon you over the simplest things.

Everything in each office of shipping appears to be a deadly secret from other offices. Which is to say that if the "Douache" have no boat sailing to suit your date, they do not know when the boats of any other company are sailing ! So you have to visit all the offices with a note-book to find out for yourself what date each sends a boat. Also it is an interesting study in surliness and indifference. What with every one having shut their office for luncheon interval, and the time wasted in insolent deliberation, it was 3.30 before I again met P., who had no better news, two o'clock being as chimerical as twelve !

This was very embittering.

I suggested rail to Tunis, skipping La Calle, our next stopping place (86 kilometres). It would be too late to make it before dark on the "bus." P. could bring it straight



# Hamмам Meskoutine and Bone

to Tunis, with or without springs, faster than if I were in it.

Then I went off to the railway station. This is part of our intelligent conversation. It was now half-past three.

*Me.* "When is there a train to Tunis?"

*Chef de Gare.* "11.40."

*Me.* "To-night?"

*Chef de Gare.* "No, this morning."

*Me.* "Oh! is there no other?"

*Chef de Gare.* "But yes! also at 4.20."

*Me.* "I'll go by that. When does it reach Tunis?"

*Chef de Gare.* "It does not go to Tunis. It goes only to La Calle!"

Words failed me. Even in English I should have been dumb. I rushed back to the garage to tell P., and found hope showing a green shoot of probability.

"Yes! the workman who had taken the job had ordered the springs and gone away for Sunday. He was now returned and 'Here were the springs,' and 'Why were we so upset when it was ready? Yes, true! not at twelve; but now it is only four and in one hour it will be together and you will be able to start!'"

What can one do? The train was due to go, so in a hurry I got the baggage and left P. to follow as best he might to La Calle, where we would stay the night, as originally intended, and make for Tunis next day.

The train is a sort of tram, the seat hard and narrow, with perpendicular back, and crowded.

I bought some chocolate and some oranges and dug myself in till 9.30.

I was anxious for fear P. should not get off after all; but on the whole it was the best arrangement, as if he did not get off, I could still wait at La Calle for him to arrive next

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

day *en route* to Tunis. Rattling and banging, stopping at wayside stations, it seemed an interminable journey. I saw people getting excited on the little sort of platform outside the carriage at one time, but I was cold and tired, the country round seemed to be completely under water, so I never knew that it was P. riding alongside on the flooded road that caused the excitement. So I sat in quite comfortable ignorance.

He got there a long time before the train and was ready to meet me and had engaged rooms for the night in a cottage, the hotel being full.

It was too dark to see anything, but one could hear the sea beating against the rocks, and one thought of the days when the pirates had a stronghold here and a fine harbour. The wild storms that made the entrance of these harbours impossible at times held the pirates in good stead. To sally out from Bone, Jijil, or any of these hidden harbours when a storm was coming up was one of their tactics. To overhaul a prize, board her, rifle her, and sail back to the refuge where none could follow who knew not the roads, was a fine game.

It used to be a great centre of the coral industries; now, apparently, there is little done. The morning showed it a bright picturesque little town with the sea in the sunshine, and rough enough to set one thinking of the pirates sailing in in their galleons, their caravals, their galleys and the other kinds of craft as the centuries passed and boat-building evolved—at their latest they were such small boats to modern eyes that the deeds and prowess of all seafarers and fighters of those days seem impossibly romantic and dangerous.



IA CAULE.



KILAIROWAN.

*Face p. 108.*



## Chapter 10      La Calle, Tabarca, Mateur, Tunis

**W**E left La Calle after a hurried breakfast, as the run to Tunis, which we must do that day, was 160 miles.

It is extraordinary how time does seem to melt away! At Algiers we had seemed 'to have time to see so much, although even then I never really thought for one minute we should do half of what we hoped. Sicily, of course, went by the board when we decided on the desert trip; Gafsa and Sfax when we were hung up by the impassable road from Tebessa to Feriana.

The two days lost at Bone cut off Bizerte and one of the days on which we had planned to see Tunis and Carthage, and here we were, a very long day's run from Tunis, and only six days left!

It was a jolly, bright day, and we packed ourselves in cheerfully. The coast road was said to be under water, so we decided to go by Ain Dralum, Tabarca, Nefsa, Mateur and Tebourba, and, barring any casualties, we looked forward to the Tunisia Palace Hotel and all our luggage, which had been forwarded there from Biskra.

By the way, it is worth noting that this can always be

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done, and when you arrive at your destination by road, you find your boxes only waiting at the station for your keys, which can be taken by the hotel *concierge*, who goes and arranges the whole thing for you.

Thirty miles from the start you cross the frontier into Tunisia. The only intimation we could see was a string with little white rags hanging from some poles. The road was good so far, long descents and climbs with sudden turns through rocky hills, rich with minerals, pyrites, lead, zinc, and even silver. Apparently these resources are rather neglected, probably owing to the absence of railways, which are now under construction from Tabarca to Nefsa, thus linking up La Calle and Tabarca to Mateur and Tunis. The forests are very beautiful. I do not know the names of the trees—a good deal of pine.

Babouche is the frontier post. This was where we had reason to feel apprehensive. We had our passports but not the triptyches for the “bus.” So, remembering the man at Tunis, we drew up with slow formality in front of the not very imposing building which shelters the power of the Tunisian *douane*. Pines, gorse and sombre cork trees form a heavy background.

We were very tactful. About thirty francs’ worth of tact and we were free. Bowing and smiling, inwardly chuckling, off we went. Had we not got through, it meant back to Bone or Phillippurell for a steamer to Marseilles.

I could not bear the thought of Bone ever again!

Up and down through forests, ever forests—sombre corks and oaks and silver oaks, olives and figs. The higher rocky mountains give place to wood-clad heights as one



# La Calle, Tabarca, Mateur, Tunis

enters the plain of Tabarca. Here are farms and other signs of Europeanized conditions.

Tabarca! I wanted to stop at Tabarca. I wanted to photograph the romantic island.

P. didn't want to stop. He pretended he did not hear me. And then he said he would stop whenever and wherever I wanted to—in the meanwhile Tabarca had been left far behind. P. said he would go back, in the sort of tone one uses to an idiot, a drunken man, or a tiresome child to humour it or them. I was exasperated, and said so. Quite a bright and sparkling dialogue took place at the top of our voices, while Tabarca fell further and further behind us—even now as I write I feel I want to stop and take that photograph! It has an island and old forts, and is really interesting. It was the centre of the land granted to the Genoese family of Lamelini at the beginning of the sixteenth century by the Ottoman Empire. Coral fisheries comprised its value.

The road kept within sight of the coast for some time here, between woods and prairie-like stretches of little blossoming plants.

Many of the ranges of hills are rich in iron—a probable 1,000 feet in altitude.

High dunes of yellow and deep, deep orange sand with struggling trees and plants, take the place of the verdant wooded landscape near Tabarca.

So high are these dunes they are like a miniature range of mountains. The *Guide Bleu* says they are as much as 600 feet in places. Just yellow, yellow sand, broken here and there by sandslips—through their peaks one only gets occasional glimpse of the sparkling sea twenty to eighty kilometres away as one goes further, until one

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

turns inland at Djebel Obiod, upon the road for Mateur.

In places we passed bales and bales of cork stacked and piled on the road side waiting for transport. Until the railway is opened all this part transports its crops to the nearest port by mule or cow wagon.

We now started making a scrunching banging noise. I could not locate it at first ; but it was maddening.

At intervals we would bump in and out of some hole in the road larger than usual with the crash and rending sound of a collision.

At last we found the mudguard of the side-car wheel had slipped backwards and was hitting every rut, stone and bump we passed !

P. was so relieved to find it nothing vital that he had no sympathy for me and the noise of it.

"If you hold your hand on it all the time it will be all right," says he airily. I maintained the silence of outrage until we stopped for lunch at a place called Djebel Obiod.

The magic word *BAINS* in very large letters upon the outer wall tempted us to tarry awhile. But inquiry elicited the information that baths there had been, but water there was none, so the baths had fallen into desuetude, and the traveller could not gratify his longing for wasteful luxury nor the country-side learn to want anything so unnecessary and eccentric.

The end of the *salle* was occupied by a bookshelf. The books were all on science. The proprietor's daughter who served us with our meal said that she had been to school in Constantine, or some big town, and since leaving she had studied science and indulged in dreams of going to college some time.

# La Calle, Tabarca, Mateur, Tunis

There are several roads to Tunis.

They told us the Beja-Tebourba one was the best, but Mateur-Tebourba being shorter, we took that.

*Très accidentée* is the description of it given by the *Guide Bleu*, which, being translated by a dictionary, means so many things—one takes one's choice: (*v. dic.*) "*accidenté, adj.*: undulating, uneven, hilly, intersected, interspersed, picturesque, eventful, full of incidents, checkered"—there you are, nine meanings and just one word, to which you add an *e* if the noun you want to call all those things is feminine.

Well, this road was all the nine and a few more besides. The mudguard continued to bump and hammer itself about, and I was fairly shaken up. At last my complaints were heard no more, as in one endeavour to talk to P. an awful jolt caused me to bite my tongue right off.

The country is hilly, but there are quite a number of farms. Good soil and plenty of rain makes it a kinder land for the colonist than is Algeria for the most part.

The scenery changes so often in these countries—it is monotonous to keep on saying so, but after the open cultivated plain we came to a desolate moor-like region; gorse and pink-blossoming scrub—looked like Dartmoor, very vast.

Iron mines are working here.

We met several smart-looking men on horseback. Blue uniform, natty boots. In nearly all cases these "generals," as we called them, were snatched from our sight by their steeds, who with hardly an exception gazed, snorted, reared and ran as we approached!

To see these dandy little men clutching wildly at their reins while they helplessly careered across country as if

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

the devil were behind them was really rather funny—for us!

We raced through Tebourba: Roman ruins, quarries, olive gardens, all passed ruthlessly, Tunis our Mecca for the time. The road really was very bad, crowded with camels, donkeys, sheep, goats, and people, and full of holes—also very dusty. One man in his haste to get two camels tied together out of the way without suffering a stampede, fell between them with a great bag of maize, which, bursting asunder, poured its golden grains all over the road. The Arab is a good-natured fellow! Seeing me looking at the disaster he gave me a smile, and you know it (the maize, not the smile) is about worth its weight in gold in these parts.

Great carts drawn by five to eight mules, laden high with onions, are bad obstacles, as the drivers sleep, and I really think the mules do so too. One man and his microscopic donkey were both asleep, I think. The donkey was piled with forage beneath which he was invisible—when he heard us he started and staggered away at a sort of shamble. The old man woke with a start, and, putting his arm round the little beast's neck, held it in its place on the road. It was like a toy.

The road passing over one hill was just broken up for repairs. I got out and walked over the ploughed fields for a mile or so while P. pushed the "bus" to the next good place.

The hills of Tunisia are not comparable to those of Algeria, which are impressive mountains, but the roads are not nearly so clever. In one declivity of half-a-mile we had five hairpin bends and a final loop.

The last few miles were again crowded. Tunis and its bay in front of us was a cheering sight.

## La Calle, Tabarca, Mateur, Tunis

The great ruined aqueduct crosses the road several times here.

Miles of high arches of warm grey stone, another monument of greatness and resource.

And so in the sunset dusk we entered Tunis. One hundred and sixty miles, and only out of my little kennel for one hour since nine !

Although one goes fast, the condition of the roads makes delays and stoppages inevitable.

## Chapter I I

## Khairowan

**T**HE evening we arrived the air was full of the yelling and singing and throb of drums which indicates a feast or festival, and on inquiring we learnt that a rich Moslem wedding was in progress. Friday is the day that Khairowan is supposed to be dressed to receive visitors, for it is the day of prayer and market day. So as we had happened on a Thursday, there were only two ladies and a husband besides ourselves. This was a happy circumstance, for the three of us were invited to the house of the bride's parents, whom we did not know, but we were ushered in by the guides and received by a party of women huddled together in a small apartment in incredible proximity. Outside we had seen the bridegroom amongst a crowd of people surrounded by a kind of choir, mostly little boys, singing and waving curious five-pronged candelabra with coloured moulded candles flaring. The candelabra are like a hand and arm, the candlestick part sticks straight out like fingers, and the whole thing held horizontally lets the grease drip and the flame flare hideously. As the procession and crowd passes, the shops light up "Bengal lights" and small fireworks, the clamour increasing as they get near the bride's house. Is she in the procession? Oh no! she is with us in the stifling room, the bedchamber of her maiden days.



## Khairowan

When we first got in we could not see the bride. The scene was indescribable. In the courtyard we had passed through crowds of negresses and what we supposed to be followers or retainers, who were busy and fussy about nothing in the Oriental way. All these persons were in a state of excitement, shouting and singing. They were many of them wearing beautiful clothes, and a few of them the jewellery we had seen in Algeria on the Khabyles. Some of these people were, I am sure, Khabyle from their head-dress and features, though I am open to contradiction, as I do not know if they come to Tunisia.

We pushed our way through this crowd and were ushered into the oddest scene.

Between two modern French wardrobes of the shiniest and richest polish was a broad divan facing the entrance. To the right a large French bedstead of brass called for recognition. The ceiling was Moorish, the doorways were arched with reed curtains, the floor, apparently, was marble or stone, with rugs. I say "apparently," because the whole floor was hidden by squatting humanity—children and women. I have no idea who or what they were in relation to the household. Some were well dressed and others just clothed. The noise and the smells were truly Eastern.

We looked round to find the bride, but no veiled person could we see at first.

Upon the divan sat four damsels dressed in gorgeous dresses, with their hair arranged extravagantly, their eyebrows pencilled to meet that ideal of beauty, "crescent moons," their hands and feet henna-ed and jingling with beads and chains. Who these people were we could not discover. They looked like dancing girls. At intervals

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

bundles and parcels were brought in, the contents of which were passed from hand to hand, and which we supposed to be wedding presents. Upon the floor, at the feet of these brilliant people, we suddenly observed a still figure. Red velvet concealed her face in a sort of cap shaped to fall in a peak in front well below the waist. She sat with her feet crossed, soles upwards, as Buddha sits, hands clasped in front of her. A fat woman, in black, felt her feet at intervals, and other women came and felt her feet, sometimes lifting up her full silk skirt to show her trousers of rich brocade, with embroidered gold leggings from knee to ankle.

This scene lasted over an hour and she never moved.

Out in the courtyard at intervals the women made the extraordinary yelling noise peculiar to the country, and the shrieks and yells and music in the street without smote the ear as the bridegroom and his procession drew near.

As it came nearer the women and children began fussing and moving about.

At last the bridegroom was at the gate, and a mob of people seemed to burst through the narrow gateway and scatter in the big courtyard. All this we saw from the bride's chamber through reed and bead curtains.

With much noise the bridegroom was conducted to the end of the courtyard, where he stood, a somewhat comic object, quite lacking in the dignity common to most Arabs.

Possibly he felt as extraneous and foolish as an English bridegroom. He stood looking round him sheepishly while the men of the crowd were all turned out, leaving only the boys, whose brazen voices kept up a sort of chant.

## Khairowan

The gate was shut, the negresses stood gaping and whispering, while within the room every one awakened as if a spell had been removed.

We were caught in a wave of humanity and found ourselves in the courtyard.

The women all yelled the yell of their kind, which, doubtless, varies for different occasions, but not to our ear. It is a strange, picturesque sound, and they seem to do it in waves. It is very high and quite musical in tone. They start quietly and *crescendo* to a great volume of sound and with a diminishing volume it dies away plaintive and eerie.

The curtains were thrown open and the bride was led out, still in the sort of velvet canopy that covered her face. It did not appear even to have eye-holes.

The yells and the singing stopped as she reached the bridegroom. She was unveiled and stood beside him for a minute or two.

Then began an orgy of kissing, where the bride kissed the girls, who all kissed each other. The women, who I suppose were of the family, closed round her, talking all at once. The negresses and the picturesquely-dressed crowd of women chattered and gossiped, when suddenly the bridegroom led the bride away through a door in the courtyard, leading into the house, which was all lit up, lights shining in all the windows. The door was shut, an unseen hand drew the shutters. Darkness descended abruptly as the choir put out their candle-torches, and we found ourselves oozing with the crowd of boys and women into the now dark and silent street. Our guides were awaiting us, and we, as lambs to the hand

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

of the high priest, were offered up on the altar of *Tourisme*.

All was ready for us, the dancers, the coffee, the crowd who had seen so many of us that they hardly noticed us. The pretence that it was a special performance was threadbare and transparent, but it was new to us and we played our part to their satisfaction, no doubt.

The guides said that the snake charmer only came once in a moon or so, and our fortune was great in having the opportunity. I began to see myself and P. as two of the oysters standing by the Walrus and the Carpenter before the feast began. Also they tried to convince us that the dervishes had been induced by bribery and promises based on our opulence to give a star performance for our benefit.

I rather shocked them by the suggestion that the wedding had been arranged for us. And do you know it would not surprise me if it had, excepting that it cost us nothing!

These people are so good at "setting the stage" for us tourists, that nothing would surprise me, not even to be told that Khairowan had been built for tourists of the Crusaders' time.

Into a large closed court we were ushered. Lit by hanging lamps of European design in the centre, the rest of the place was gloomy.

A row of chairs with matting under them were ready for us and a few Arabs present were sitting there. It was the weirdest scene! I suppose every one that goes to Khairowan sees it, but for those who have not been I will describe it.

On the floor in the centre squatted the band. Pipes

## Khairowan

and drums and reed pipes. They played fast with a rhythm so accentuated that one's whole body swayed to it unconsciously, the nasal scream of the reeds rose to frenzy to die suddenly with rapid downward cadence, the drums pulsed and throbbed. One of them, played with the flat of the hand, produced a sort of high, empty "thub-thub" above the purring throb of the rest. The players, in turbans and thrown back *burnouses*, swayed and nodded as they played. The shadows thrown by the unshaded swinging lamps added their devil's dance to the scene. Beyond the band were a row of men, for the most part in coat and fez, who danced shoulder to shoulder, hands dangling loose, heads wagging loose on their shoulders. So fast their legs moved that they looked *en bloc* like some grotesque mechanical travesty. The place seemed full of waves of sound beating on the senses, waves of motion holding the eyes.

Through the gloom of our places and the smoke of some aromatic wood the scene looked unreal, fantastic, and yet solemn, as though some great idea pervaded it. So it does. It is a fanatic and hysterical expression of the, numerically, most important religion of modern times.

Between us and the musicians a quiet man was standing, his arms folded. He looked rather young. His eyes were light hazel, his colour a light but definite brown. He had a close beard, only on the jaw-bone and chin. He was a marabout. Islam has no official priesthood in the same sense as have both Christian and pagan religions. This marabout belonged to the mosque. In the days of independence the mosques and much land were possessed by the marabouts. He stood at the right-



# Through Algeria and Tunisia

hand corner of the oblong formed by the band and the dancers.

I did not know what was coming and was becoming hypnotized with the rhythm of sound and sight when a whistling figure appeared mysteriously.

Round and round he spun. In fact, he spun so that his clothes, ragged, dusky draperies, flew round him and he looked like a top does spinning from side to side, the music getting even more frenzied with him. Shouts and gasps mingled with the music.

I had noticed a man holding a scorpion by its sting between his finger and thumb. To my horror the dancer stopped and, opening his mouth, bit the wretched creature so that its sting remained between the finger and thumb of its captor. He then stood in front of me and, opening his mouth wide between bites, proceeded to eat it! I could see it writhing on his tongue.

It was a sickening sight!

I turned away, feeling paler every minute, to find a deformed man with a mouth like an ogre devouring a large cactus as big as a soup plate and about two inches thick with the apparent relish of a schoolboy eating a cake. Seeing that if you handle a cactus carelessly your hand is filled with its fine irritating little spines, it was a sight to make you gasp. Beyond again was a man with two long heavy swords stuck in his side, while two men hit their hilts with sledge-hammers.

The man whose body was being apparently pierced was at first very excited, became exhausted, and as the swords were withdrawn, apparently sank into a syncope on the shoulder of the marabout, who had advanced towards him. This grave young man held his hands,



# Khairowan

bowed his head over the stricken one and whispered a few words. The man opened his eyes like one coming out of a trance to the realities of life. He drew himself up, and walked away steadily enough. Then two almost naked men stepped from nowhere in particular with long rapiers which they brandished about with savage cries, so near to our chairs that one felt that some portion of one would be shorn off sooner or later. However, they soon settled down to their horrid business. One took the rapier and pressed the point to his cheek. I couldn't believe my eyes when he pressed the point so that it went through his left cheek, and his right cheek was pushed out by the point till, with a nasty sort of "plop," it came through. Then the lights and the smoke and the crowd went round in circles, the music went far away, and I realized that unless I held on I should faint. The guide touched my arm: "Look at Monsieur," said he, and there was P. green, with closed eyes, more nearly gone than I. When I looked again at the swordsmen it was all over. He of the pierced face was leaning exhausted on the marabout's shoulder. One drop of blood was wiped away with a handkerchief. The few words were muttered, with the hand clasp, and he went away. A child of about six came to have swords hammered into his "tummy," and another man used a sword on his person in such a manner that one expected him to fall in half, like the seventh "little nigger boy"—

One chopped himself in half, and then there were six.

We, however, did not wait, we passed away into the dark silent night. Inhaling the cold air our trembling knees regained their strength, our eyes beheld once more angles

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

and surfaces instead of whistling circles and flashing lights. "Now," said the guide, "we go to see the wonderful charmer of serpents," but I objected, saying that I had seen many charmers of serpents. "But," said he, "never a charmer such as he who even now is waiting us in the café, having specially consented to appear before your distinguished selves. Not for the ordinary tourists are these special affairs," he added sily, as he doubtless adds daily to enhance his arrangements in the illumination of the human vanity which loves to be distinguished from the crowd.

Anyway, into a crowded café we were pushed and seated. The atmosphere of Baker Street Station in the days of the old Underground Railway enfolded us. We groped our way to one of the round white iron tables and were served with coffee. When we got accustomed to the reek and obscurity we saw a man squatting on the floor blowing a pipe to a bundle of rags. Presently a little black spot, with a flickering little black flame, was visible for an instant ere it withdrew again. Again it appeared and advancing proved to be the narrow nose and mouth of a great hooded cobra which uncoiled itself from the rags. It reared its head and spread its hood, its sinister eyes fixed on the man who, playing, moved in a circle, the cobra turning as on a pivot, keeping its eyes fixed upon him.

It was no doubt partly the atmosphere and partly the excitement of the last show ; but it seemed different to any other similar performance. It had somehow a pathos in the patient anxious snake and the solemn charmer.

They then did a sword dance such as we saw at Biskra and we really were allowed to seek our beds.



GRAND MOSQUE, KHAIRWAN.



AMPHITHEATRE AT EL DJEM.

*Face p. 124.*



## Khairowan

Sooth to say, it would need real fatigue to tempt one to their murky embrace, and the smells in that hotel beat all the smells of Araby. They absolutely waited for you and as you fell to their first onslaught it was thick enough to keep you standing up.

The *patronne* said next day—

“Mais c’est rien ; beaucoup des Anglais, ont remarque je sais, mais,”—and a shrug expressed the fussiness of our degraded nation to a shade !

Next morning we were to leave for El Dhem, *en route* for Tunis.

We had seen the mosques in the morning.

*La grande mosque de Khairowan* contains the tomb of the murdered servant of the Prophet, Sidi Okbar ben Nufur, who was stabbed to death here in Khairowan. He founded the city and built and founded the mosque A.D. 671. It is a very large mosque. A large court with a pillared colonnade, has the high minaret in its northern wall. The colonnade is, for the most part, of Byzantine pillars of various beautiful marbles, put to this use by the conquering Arabs who found them in one of the Roman towns with which Tunisia abounded—Carthage probably. The big court of prayer is paved with marble. The saint’s tomb is in the centre of the southern wall. A cupola forms the roof, under which rests the shell of Sidi Okbar’s soaring soul.

From the time of its founding till the tenth century, Khairowan, with the Aglabites, was a capital town. Its importance was curtailed and superseded by Tunis, so it stagnated in safety in its backwater until the French annexed it without firing a shot, in 1871.

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Ben Okbar Nufur! Did you see and turn in your grave or curse them from Paradise at the sight? Did you see the troop of French cavalry that rode into the courtyard of your sanctuary, and so riding robbed Khair-owan of its honour?

It was done deliberately to stab the heart of Islam, as the knife of the assassin had stabbed the heart of its founder.

Before this sacrilege the foot of the infidel knew not its marble pavements. But now infidel and believer alike walk on the mats which are laid to keep the boots of such from defiling the floor, for the bare feet of the faithful when they leave their shoes or sandals outside to come to prayer.

The walls of Khairowan are crenellated rich mud colour, and in parts painted white, with towers at the corners, and picturesque gateways.

In the evening we had stood on a flat roof and watched the sun set behind a bank of black cloud, through which flashes of lightning broke, illuminating the silhouette of minaret and ramparts which is Khairowan in its most romantic aspect.

Next morning we roved the bazaar and bought *burnouses*, a pipe and a drum, all of which had to travel with me in the side-car.

The bazaar was picturesque to a degree, and we were loth to leave, but Sousse, with El Dhem *en route*, was our day's run, so we had to leave about ten o'clock, reluctantly.



## Chapter 12 Khairowan to El Dhem and Sousse

**W**E were late leaving Khairowan. It was market day. The streets were thronged with people. The stalls were gay with scarlet of peppers, gold of pumpkins, red tomatoes, oranges and green stuffs. The sun came in and out; we spent some time trying to do a "snap-shot or two," but as sure as we got the thing ready for action so surely did the sun retire behind a cloud as though he were watching us.

Donkeys carrying colossal loads of the fodder they never would taste, poor Barmecides, blocked the narrow ways; it was really just like any other market day; but it has a glamour, this Khairowan, which makes it seem more interesting and picturesque than other places.

The snake-charmer presented himself to be photographed, and the guides brought us the drum that he used and offered it for sale. This and some pipes and *burnouses* were squeezed into the little car with me, and off we went.

We were in the highest spirits, never had the expedition seemed so enjoyable! Even the state of the road could not damp our ardour, and we both sang at the top of

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

our voices different tunes, with the noise of the engine as a barrier between us.

We didn't take the main road, which meant a *détour* as far as Msakene and thirty kilometres further. The road we took was an unmetalled road, soft and muddy in places, and was crossed at intervals by unbridged streams running after the late heavy rain as from six inches to two feet deep. The first one we sloshed through, and went on congratulating ourselves that nothing had seized. But after another and again another, we felt we were tempting Providence. To cut off the engine and wade and push was the only way. Some of them had a stone causeway, others were all soft oozy mud.

After about a dozen of them at intervals of half a mile or so, we began to realize that it was the habit of this road.

To go back again seemed just as risky as to go on. So on we went. After a village called Ksar, we passed none till Yinala, about thirty kilometres, so a breakdown would have meant something pretty serious. No cars were using the road, as people who knew its peculiarities avoid it after rain, going round by Msakene. The engine was very hot, as we were pressing on, and it surely was marvellous that nothing untoward happened. Our lucky star seemed in the ascendant. One was a real river. A construction party was removing the remains of a bridge. The head of it told us that the Public Works had decided it was too expensive to keep the road bridged and had been demolishing bridges as they fell into bad repair.

They seemed amused at us !

When we got to Zmala we struck the main road, which goes as straight as a die to El Dhem, which we could see

## Khairowan to El Dhem and Sousse

twenty-five kilometres away perched on an eminence. The road was perfect and we speeded on up and down, the amphitheatre growing as we approached until its full magnificence was apparent about five kilometres away.

Against the cold, silver sky its warm yellow-grey walls rear up three stories of archways. It takes your breath away with its grandeur.

There it stands among the olive trees and the little huts of the Arab village which surrounds it. But as you approach it by our road from north-west, you see it alone. The village is on the eastern side, with its incongruous French railway station and insignificant streets.

It is all that remains of the city named Thysdrus, whose inhabitants thronged its galleries on the days when, in the time of Cæsar, prisoners of war, gladiators and others were fighting wild beasts in its great arena. About the eighth century the great Berber woman-soldier, Kahena, used it as a fortress, when the Berbers were making their last stand against the Arabs who brought the Crescent, and, as we have said before, made North Africa their own. Until 1693 it was intact, when in the subduing of some rebels who had fortified themselves there, the then Dey broke down a part of the wall.

This amphitheatre is nearly as large as the Coliseum in Rome, and is in better preservation.

Its wonderful position of solitary grandeur gives it an advantage over any similar edifice, only to be realized by those who are fortunate enough to have seen it. There are other remains in the vicinity, but we did not look for them. After climbing up to the top of the Coliseum and taking a few photographs, we adjourned to the refreshment-room, made a hearty lunch, and departed for Sousse.

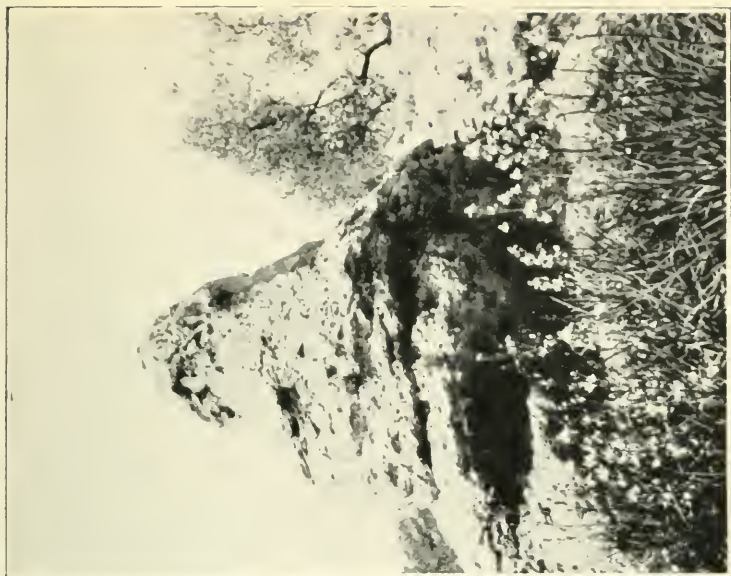
## Through Algeria and Tunisia

The sun had been playing hide-and-seek all day, and now the clouds banked up to the west, and ever and anon little gusty showers blew up, crossed us, and wetting us, fled away. Presently thunder, lightning, wind and hail was upon us from a black sky. The road was a wonderful surface, newly metalled, and with the rain wet on it looked like a ribbon of black glass. P. was in great spirits, and we went faster than ever we had done before. Presently he said, "Hurray! just touching forty now!" It felt to me like a hundred and forty, and we were swaying from side to side. Even if one didn't feel a little nervous it was so uncomfortable. After some distance I said: "I'd like to go a little slower." I was buttoned up inside the hood; I couldn't see much and I began to feel almost sea-sick. So I asked him to go slower. After which events seemed to have moved with lightning rapidity. I heard him say: "Now we are down to twenty." A horrible swerve followed, and I heard him say: "Something desperate has really happened." Jerking and swaying, the side-car rose in the air and passed over the bike as it took a plunge off the road over a culvert into a ditch.

It was only a few seconds from the first swerve to the somersault. It seemed ages before I felt the ground with the back of my head, and I thought my neck was broken. I was afraid to ask P. if he was there. I knew the heavy bicycle must be on him. Presently I felt him move. "Are you dead?" I said in a feeble voice; and when he said, "No, are you?" I realized that we really had escaped. To get out was the next thing. I was literally folded up in the side-car. I got out first, rolling out into six inches of mud. It was a sight! There was the poor little "bus" upside down and broken to bits.



WATER CARRIER.



CONE OF SULPHUR DEPOSIT AT HAMMAM MISKOUTINE.





## Khairowan to El Dhem and Sousse

The bike was on its handle-bars, which were embedded in mud. P. lay on his back pulling himself out. No one will ever know what saved us. The cause we soon discovered. The frame of the side-car (which was, I think, of rather a light make for the strain we had put it to) had parted—a clean break in one of the arms. Of course, this had put the whole show out of control. The luck of it all was that it should have happened there and just after we had slowed down. Had it happened on any of the mountain roads of course we should have been with St. Peter pretty quickly.

We were thoroughly bruised and shaken. As I climbed out of the ditch I saw an Arab running towards us gesticulating, his eyes hanging on his cheeks, his clothes fluttering. He had seen us go, of course. He could speak no French. He made sympathetic noises and gaped at us. I tried to get a photograph. How I wish I had! But what with the wind and rain, my shaking hands and everything, I didn't manage it. To get the side-car off and get help was our next thought.

Let anyone who reads these lines note that an accident in this country is a very helpless thing. Where we were wrecked was forty-eight kilometres from Sousse and about the same from El Dhem.

If we had been hurt it would have been hours before help could be got. Anyway, we were thankful to find ourselves whole. Heaven knows how one would fare if seriously injured.

Our friend lent us a hand, and we got the wreck righted, to find the bike unhurt, except for a trifling matter of a bent step and a broken lamp.

So we decided to separate the wreck of the side-car

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

from the bike, so that P. could ride into Sousse and bring out a car to carry me and the pieces there. If I had been really enterprising I suppose I should have ridden behind him. At no time should I feel happy like that; and even P. did not suggest it then! The side-car had been put on some time before, and all the nuts were well rusted home. It was no easy job. P. began wrestling with it. Two more inhabitants grew out of the road and stood gaping at us. Good-humoured and smiling men they were. They asked for cigarettes, which we gave them, and they stood in good positions for enjoying the entertainment.

Presently we were further reinforced by an Arab riding a tiny donkey and leading a large camel. He could talk French and was helpful.

He said there was a small railway station about three miles away, and advised me to ride his camel and go there.

P. and I consulted and agreed that I should go to the station and get shelter while he got the bike clear and went on. Should he fail to clear the bike he would join me at the station.

Very sadly I turned to walk away. It seemed such a pity to have this happen so near the end of such a very successful expedition, apart from the uncomfortable feeling that possibly the bike would break down before Sousse, even if P. did get away.

I also didn't like this Arab person, who would come with me. I suppose it was the "shake up" of the accident; but I could only think of the warnings we had had not to be out after dark on lonely roads.

"Ils couperaient la gorge comme un mouton," ran in my head as the darkness swallowed us up completely.

## Khairowan to El Dhem and Sousse

When we got to the corner where the road turned to the railway he said : " Now, what are you going to give me ? My road is straight on. I have guided you and advised you." I nearly handed him my purse and said, " Take my money, but spare my life " sort of thing, like people in cinemas do !

However, I really said : " How much do you want ? " instead, and wondered if my knees would hold me up if they shook much more. He took twenty francs off me, mounted the donkey and went on. I was thankful to be alone till I got near the station, where three huge dogs came howling and jumping at me. Just as I saw myself divided among them like an unearthed fox, a man rushed out and drove them off.

He was the only creature there, and the station the only building. It looked like a toy on the open plain.

I told him what had happened, and I went back to the scene of the crash with an Arab boy, to find that P. had gone. The reconnoitring party were guarding the wreck and said P. had gone off soon after I left. Back to the station I struggled and sat down to wait. It was then half-past eight.

The nice little Frenchman told me he had nothing worthy to offer me, but invited me to have an omelette he was about to make.

Which invitation I accepted gladly. I am afraid he was really disappointed when just as it was ready we heard a motor horn, and there was my poor P., looking worn out, come to fetch me.

It was very lucky altogether. He had found the bike was all right and got to Sousse with no mishap. He had

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

got a car at once and engaged a room at the hotel at Sousse. There was a train, but not till midnight.

To get the poor broken side-car on the motor was not a difficult matter, and the *cortège* started for Sousse. Before long my bedraggled person was being led by the kind *patronne* of the hotel at Sousse into her own best parlour. She had prepared tea and, putting cognac into it, made us drink it. After which we felt better and were able to laugh at what up till then had seemed such a tragic catastrophe.

There was only one bedroom available. When we had got over her surprise at the idea, we prevailed upon her to put screens so as to divide it in half; she remarked that at noon next day a "Monsieur avec sa femme et deux fillettes" were going to share the room. There was no bath, but with a few spoonfuls of hot water and a little scraping we managed to get clean. The honest people downstairs, when I appeared in the little black satin dress that had been my companion all the way for an evening change, and P. in clean blue serge, his one change, were so taken aback at our appearance when clean that they became quite shy and formal!

So ended, a day prematurely, our ride from Algiers to Tunis! We had not seen half as much as we had intended, but in spite of the ups and downs, the cold and the various misfortunes and *contretemps*, we did wish we were just beginning. We did feel hurt with Fate snatching away our last, last day! But we did also feel amazed to be still alive and sound in mind and limb after that day's crash.

## Chapter 13

## Sousse, Tunis, Marseilles

WHEN we arose next morning, very stiff and not very happy, we realized that our daily drives, with their pleasures and discomforts and general vicissitudes, had become the mainspring of our existence, without which it seemed an unprofitable world. P. rushed off on his bicycle, leaving me despondent and resentful, to paddle about on my flat feet and inspect the town of Sousse.

I wasn't in the humour for the town of Sousse. I read that it is a town of 20,000 inhabitants, of which many are Israelites. This pleases me, this last word. I'd rather be an Israelite than a Jew, if I were one; and, from a less amiable point of view, it would pin the Chosen People to their origin and nationality.

Sousse is a very ancient town of the time of the Phœnicians. The Romans called it Hadrumetus, and the buildings of later and recent times are in part composed of the stones of their ruined city.

The prospect of seeing ugly mosaics which I felt, that day, were like badly done "crazy china" paving, left me unmoved.

The Catacombs, which are a sort of underground Christian cemetery, set me reflecting savagely on the fuss



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Christians made about themselves. And I made up my mind that nothing would induce me to go to those catacombs. After these pleasing and interesting reflections I gazed in the shops, whose wares all appeared equally undesirable, and the Israelites and others who stood about the streets were each more repulsive than the other.

Perhaps if one visited Sousse without having nearly broken one's neck and getting drenched to the skin the day before, it might come up to its description in the *Guide Bleu*, which is really most alluring.

My head seemed as if it was tied precariously to my shoulders with hot wires and a cold weight to keep them in place.

I thought I would like to buy a hat to face the Tunisia Palace in. One enters an hotel and passes the "well-dressed crowd of animated visitors" (*vide* any journal), with an effect exactly in proportion to one's hat. And that from the satisfactory point of view in which its effect on beholders does not count. It is the moral support lent by the assurance that one's taste in hats is of the super quality.

One knows this by looking at the atrocities with which other people proclaim their satisfaction, and from which they derive support, under such trials as the disapproving or even derisive stare which the majority of travellers bestow upon a new arrival!

The sun was shining and it was a warm day, but all the hats of Sousse were too dreadful. I wonder if it was my disgruntled spirits or reality. They stick in my mind as things at which I should have laughed instead of cursing the taste of people in hats, as I looked at my own horrible face in the glass and reviewed my brown suède hat, out



## Sousse, Tunis, Marseilles

of shape, bits out of the brim and still wet, a shapeless mass. My brown suit looked like the garments which people send to jumble sales. I had had to buy a pair of shoes. They were yellow brown with heels like stilts and bumpy toes, and stockings of alleged silk of a coarse webby texture like a fishing-net—and a colour !

So the morning passed and, without wishing to be dead, I felt that I wouldn't be excited or surprised to realize that we had "passed over," and that our next world, according to our deserts, was enfolding us.

P. came back about twelve, and we took a morose drive round the "charming environments" of Sousse.

A victoria of antediluvian build and iron wheels, driven by a creature who must have been the reincarnation of one of the bloodiest pirates, and pulled by a shapeless hide bag with curly legs, up and down endless white glarey roads ! It was a happy day !

Two o'clock saw me huddled up and despondent in a hired motor-car with the wreckage of the side-car in the back, bound for Tunis.

P. sailed away, so filling me with envy and loneliness that I felt as though I was conducting the funeral of a cherished friend—of my last friend, left betrayed and lonely by a callous world.

And—heigh ho ! Bumpety, rattle and creak and bang, a puncture—this half-way ! Again bumping and jolting. We couldn't have gone very far, because we were still so long getting to Tunis, but from the bad road and the way the man drove it felt like £100 worth of the "Wiggle-Woggle" as exhibited at the White City at six-pence a run.

The longest day must end, and I drove to the garage

## Through Algeria and Tunisia

opposite the hotel about five o'clock and delivered the corpse to the undertakers, bargained for a coffin, and arranged a *cortège* to the ship.

I forget the name of the ship, of which more anon.

A battle in the post office, in which I was victorious, rather raised my spirits.

I went to ask at the *Poste Restante* for letters and parcels.

I had the hotel *concierge* with me, a pleasant young man, but not too bright. I don't think French was his native language any more than mine, so as our only medium of communication it did not always click.

I approached the usual barred cage at the post office, and even more than usually Zoo-like was its appearance, owing to the physiognomy of the wild beast the bars controlled. A Maltese he was, with little close eyes and a general air of uncleanness and ferocity.

As usual I said "Monsieur" and "S'il v'plait" every few words to try and placate him. I suppose I said something untoward, in ignorance, for suddenly he pressed his face forward—just as an exasperated ape does—and said: "An official of the French Post Office is not to be insulted! Were there fifty parcels or letters for such as you, you should receive—not one!" I appealed to the *concierge*, who, saying he did not understand, advised a visit to the office of the *Chef de la Poste*. A delightful gentle person, who heard my tale, and with an air of an outraged deity moving as if on wheels, preceded me with velocity down passages and through offices, to our friend's lair. I couldn't follow what was said. It was rapid and to the point, but before I realized things, the deity had bowed, expressed regret, vanished, and the crestfallen

## Sousse, Tunis, Marseilles

baboon was handing out letters and parcels as fast as deals a gambler at his last hand with the luck against him.

After a good dinner, things looked more rosy, and we chatted first and then played bridge under Belgian rules with the people we had met at Khairowan.

Next day Easter Sunday.

Have you ever seen giant rolls with eggs embedded and baked in them as raisins in an ordinary cake? I never had before.

We enjoyed that day. We dismissed our guides and indulged ourselves with the idea that we would shop in the Souk and make bargains. And we did.

It's beautifully simple. A man says "A hundred francs," you say "Fifty" and walk on. He runs after you, and twenty-five francs' worth of merchandise is yours for fifty. As your fame precedes you, the original price is raised, so you pay a hundred francs for the twenty-five francs' worth, two hundred having been asked.

Next move; you offer a quarter of the asked price, and so on.

The last move in our case was to meet a man who told us we had paid too much for everything. He said, for his part, he would have got us real bargains and, any way, he was a poor man who had fought in the war, and a few francs from such millionaires as us who would never miss it would be a suitable mark of our recognition of a hero—so we recognized him. The next day was much the same, and we went up to the gardens and saw the sights generally. Packed our things.

We had taken our passage on the boat of the Douache Company. There is first, second and third accommodation.

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The first voyage, as we did, you pay a first-class fare. I should never do another, but if I did I'd take a third fare and save my money; for first, second and third have the same accommodation, the same food and smells.

We saw a car being loaded. A nice car and its nice English owner (yes, travelling teaches one to put that adjective with that proper noun, more often than not).

It was hung on a short-armed crane and hauled up with its mud-guards crumpling up against the side of the boat. Up went the bike, dangling precariously. Up went the sarcophagus containing our late lamented side-car, and we stepped lightly aboard the lugger.

Pigs were grunting below, horses screaming and stamping. Passengers of the fourth, fifth and sixth class were preparing for the worst on the dirty deck.

*Déjeuner* soon after the start. Oh! and oh! It was rough. A family opposite us did not feel at all well. Madame, after exhibiting all the worst symptoms with the aid of her serviette, departed in merciful haste. The child, whose face had become green and who looked as if an illness of cataclysmic proportions would overtake her at any moment, said thickly, "Oh, papa!" Papa, grasping a pickled herring with one hand and a slice of bread in the other, clapped them together. He gave this sandwich into her hand with the word of command, and she mercifully vanished in time!

Mournful sounds were now heard all over the ship.

Terrible sights and sounds rendered the deck too horrible.

After a squalid evening meal we went to bed.

The whole voyage was a nightmare.

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One man, lying on a chair, was blocking the companion exit.

"Please, monsieur," said I, "can you let me pass?"

"Mais non, madame," was the reply, "si je bouge je vomit." And he lay back and closed his eyes and emitted alarming groaning sounds.

*Never* do it. Wait for the *Duc d'Aumale* or any of that line, even if a forgiving wife or a rich uncle recall you.

Yes, we survived it. And the train swallowed me up London bound. P. started for Germany via Paris, and all was over.

N.B.—No matter how tiresome it may seem, insure all your belongings when travelling. I lost, between Marseilles and London, a small box. I was insured, which was satisfactory, but all my films and sketches were lost, and neither were insurable, having no commercial value, and irreplaceable. The few photographs used in this narrative are from P.'s negatives.

The remains followed by steamer and, wonderful to relate, renewed and rejuvenated, the whole "bus" is to all intents and purposes as it was before the start, waiting, and vainly I fear, for us to do it again in some other country.



## Chapter 14      Islam : The Arab Religion

"Islam is the name given by the followers of the Arabian Prophet to their Religion. It means peace, greeting, safety. It does not involve, however, any idea of fatalism. In its ethical sense it signifies striving after Righteousness."

AMEER ALI SYED, M.A.C.I.E.

**I**SLAM, the creed of Mahommed the Arabian prophet, is the youngest of all the great creeds. Six hundred and eleven years after Christ Mahommed received his "call." Only a century later the hordes of Arab tribes, united for the first time under his teaching, swept all before them in a wave of conquest, and had carried the Crescent to the shores of the Atlantic. It was this heterogeneous people whose hand was to rescue and keep alight the torch of culture dropping from the dying hand of the proud empire in the final scenes of whose downfall they were to be such a factor.

These people were of great antiquity. Never touched by the conquerors of the world for various reasons and because of various circumstances, they had retained the simplicity of the patriarchal life of their remote ancestors.

Nomadic, their tents of wool, their camels, horses and slaves their property as such, centuries and centuries had left them unchanged.



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Pride of birth and devotion to tribe kept them homogeneous as a race, heterogeneous in customs, and disintegrated as a nation by the tribal wars, jealousies and tribal segregation.

Poetry and poets were their passion and objects of veneration. "The poetry of the Arabs is the history of their people," is a saying as proverbial as it is true.

When Mahommed arrived at a thinking age he, and he was by no means the first "inquirer" or thinker of his period, realized the abasement of his people and country.

Drinkers of wine, drunkenness was prevalent. Gambling and revolting immorality largely filled the lives of a people for whom their religion had lost its meaning.

Superstition and dreadful practices, such as the burying alive of female children, killing or burying alive of animals with their masters, for the use of these masters in the next world, corrupted the national character.

Sabæanism, the religion of the Arabs from the remotest time to the rise of Islam, was, broadly speaking, the worship of the heavenly host, the stars, the sun, the moon. A simple natural religion. Allah was the supreme deity, Seth, Ishmael, Abraham, Jacob and many other names familiar in our Old Testament were their prophets. This, it should be emphasized, was so when Mahommed was born, as it is a common fallacy amongst the bigoted or ill-informed to declare that Mahommed stole his Book from Jews and Christians and grafted his idea upon the Christian Bible, supplanting the Christian idea with his own as a cuckoo takes the nest of another bird.

This is absolutely contradicted by history and facts. As the Old Testament of the Jews is to the New Testament of Christ, so were the Prophets of the Old Testament

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

the prophets of Mahommed's country and religion. As the Jewish God is the God of Christ's teaching and the God of his people before him, so was Allah the God of Mahommed and his people before him. One of the great differences being that, whereas Christ must be accepted by Christians as the Son of God, Mahommed is his Prophet only.

Mahommed was brought up to venerate Christ as a chosen prophet in common with his co-religionists; in fact, in the Kaaba, the great temple of deities and idols at Mecca, was a statue of Jesus and the Virgin.

This religion had lost all cohesion by reason of the special beliefs and gods which had grown up in each tribe. Allah was God to all Arabs; angels were his daughters and inhabitants of heaven. The special gods, jinns and spirits of each tribe had led to a vagueness and forgetfulness of Allah the Supreme Deity.

The chief seat of this faith was at Mecca. The Kaaba, which means a cube, was the temple built by Adam, beloved of Abraham, and for ages under the guardianship of the descendants of Ishmael, for when Hagar fled in the wilderness with her son it was near Mecca she rested.

Mecca for countless ages had been sacred, and a sanctuary, and it passed with its religious importance from one family to another until Mahommed's ancestors had it and made it rich and powerful. Pilgrimages to Mecca had been a form of Asiatic religious observance from days of antiquity.

So Mahommed, born in 570 of the Christian era, was born into the family whose position was that of guardians to the Kaaba.

He was the son of Abdullah, the son of Mattalib (who had dissipated the family revenues), the son of Hashim,

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the son of Abd Mena-aj, the son of Quizai, who was the first of the prophet's family to have the guardianship of the Kaaba with its attendant privileges. His father had been dead some months before he was born, and his mother, Amina, a native of Medina, handed him over, according to custom, to a foster-mother, by whom he was reared in the hard and healthy life of the desert.

His father had left him nothing but a few camels, so young Mahommed perforce must earn his living. He tended herds and flocks, a calling looked upon as somewhat degrading by the Arab of his day.

At the age of twenty-five he married Kadijah, a rich widow fifteen years older than himself, with whom he lived, his only wife, until she died about eighteen years later, soon after he received his "call."

Of this period of his life there are many contradictory tales and traditions. Nothing very positive is known beyond the fact that he was respected as an honest and upright man of irreproachable morals.

He travelled to Syria and other countries, and developed very early a habit of solitude and meditation, with a longing to reform his people and their religion.

Amongst the Arabs were many Jews. Christianity was established and had a bishopric in the territory of Yemen. This Christianity, by the time Mahommed was born, was fanatic and warlike in its priesthood and fervent followers, while its masses were as corrupt in their Christianity as the Arabs in their debased religion.

The lack of peace and cohesion of the Christians of his day and country pained Mahommed. Judaism he tried to reconcile with his own trend of thought, without success, but his tolerance to both these creeds was notorious.

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At the age of forty an angel appeared to him when he was in that condition of ecstasy frequent with him, who spent days in fasting and meditation. On the heights of a mountain near Mecca, spirits called to him and bade him "read." He was frightened at this, his first experience, but Kadijah told him to have no fear, to wait for further calls, which came to him frequently. So began the Great Idea which under the name of Islam was to found empires, to inspire conquest, to take enlightenment to countries darkened with abuses and warring sects, who so destroyed their own religion that Islam's power and simplicity found an easy progress.

But few converts rewarded his efforts at first. Hostilities and jealousies made life at Mecca impossible, and so he fled to Yathrub in 621, from which flight, the "Hejira," the Mahommedans date their era.

His faithful wife, Kadijah, had died a few years previously, and he had taken Sanda, a widow, in marriage. The people of Yathrub in a short time became converted to his new religion, and he became governor. The wisdom of his administration justified their faith, and so began the consolidation and real growth of this faith.

Nine years after his flight to Yathrub, since called El Medinah, which means "The Prophet," he marched with a vast army and subdued Mecca.

Whole tribes declared their conversion by deputations sent to Medina to accept the faith. These deputations took back a teacher or disciple to teach the new converts the faith of Islam in its purity.

For Jews and Christians, the "peoples of the book,"<sup>1</sup> he

<sup>1</sup> Mahommedans refer to their Old Testament and ours together as the Book, and the Jews come into this description too obviously.

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enjoined on his followers forbearance and tolerance. He consolidated a sort of commonwealth of Islam, and when he died, in the year 632 of our era, only twenty years after his "call," he had founded the faith that was to conquer half the Old World of those days, and to call to its tenets one-fifth of the present population of the world.

Born 570, "called" 611, Hejira 621, death 632. The last twenty years of his life were spent in the propagation and formulating of Islam. A hundred years later his followers had spread its light as fire spreads in a dry forest.

Islam, as it is written in the Koran from the mouth of "The Prophet," is pure Theism in its conception of a creator.

According to its tenets God is supreme and One. His power is unlimited, tempered with love and mercy towards mankind and all His creatures.

Mahommed is a man, a messenger. No divinity, no supernatural power or origin are claimed for him.

The Koran is his book of thought, conviction and teaching. Apart from its religious interest it is said by Arabic scholars to be one of the finest pieces of literature in the world of poetry and religion.

In his life and teaching is apparent a tolerance and breadth of view which has not always been attained by his followers. Like all creeds, Islam has suffered in reputation from the follies and crimes of its people.

The entire absence of a priesthood, with attendant evils from arrogation of power; the almost entire absence of ritual, are advantages which have kept Islam's spiritual power pure. Its refusal to recognize adventitious distinctions of colour, class, or race, with its democratic principles, are important elements in its success and progress.



# Through Algeria and Tunisia

Intolerance, fatalism and sensual indulgence are the three qualities inaccurately attributed by his enemies to Mahommed. They are as foreign to the spirit of Islam as are the sins of Christians to the teaching of Christ.

A great deal of the injustice and misconception is due to the fact that the rise of Islam and the descent of its triumphant armies upon the world, synchronized with a temporary eclipse of peace, learning and culture in Europe.

Later, of course, the Crusaders, that strange mixture of religious fanatics, lovers of adventure and robbers, for various reasons, according to their qualities, reviled the Saracen, and accused Islam of the crimes of those whom Mahommed would as surely have disowned, as would Christ those of the Crusaders who under the sign of the Cross committed cruelties and atrocities in the name of Christianity.

For the first few centuries after Mahommed's revelation Islam waxed great indeed. The empire and kingdoms conquered and founded by the faithful in Europe, Africa and Asia were of the greatest known. Spain was redeemed from barbarism A.D. 700, learning and the arts flourished in their ports and towns.

Allowing for the early times, and with comparison of the other parts of the then civilized world, the enlightenment of the Arabs and Moors, Islam in fact, was marvellous.

In the fall of the Moorish empire (end of fifteenth century) went centuries of culture, learning and romance. Islam's power was scattered, to be continued—shorn of its grandeur, shorn of its real purity—by nations of mixed descent and less virility.

Its reputation suffered at the hands of such rulers who



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remained in Africa, by the pirates who disgraced it, and by the excesses of the Ottoman Caliphate.

Islam, in common with other creeds, has its sects and schisms. The two great divisions are the Sunnis and the Shiahs, in which there are further subdivisions. Having no ritual, the differences are all in opinion, interpretation and ethics, not in fundamental belief.

The Sunni church in its varying communions is professed by Turks, Arabs, Egyptians, Afghans, other Central Asian Moslems, and the bulk of Indian Mahomedans.

The Sunnis recognize the supremacy of the Ottoman Caliphs.

When the Mongols or Tartars, savages from Tartary, swept like a flood of destruction over middle and western Asia, the destruction of Bagdad and the flight of the Abbaside Caliphs led to the founding of the Sunni church.

One of the Abbaside family escaped to Egypt, where he was made Caliph. A successor gave up his rights and dignities to the Sultan Selim, the great Turkish conqueror, and upon this renunciation the title of the Sultans of Turkey to the spiritual leadership of Islam is based.

The Arabs of Tunisia and Algeria are practically all Sunnis, and Islam is to all intents the religion of the peoples, with the variations of fervour and purity contingent on localities and progress.

It is hard to realize in the attenuated wraith of itself the Power that once ruled the earth, whose poetry and arts, in their survival, proclaim its spirituality as well as its pride.

Low lie my palaces, and desolate  
The halls, Mu'tammed,<sup>1</sup> of thy ancient State;

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<sup>1</sup> Mu'tammed was the exiled king of Seville, eleventh century.

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

Yet at my tomb we kiss, as it is meet,  
The dust, with weeping at thy quiet feet.

NASHAR (eleventh century).

Lo ! every nation hath its appointed day, the which when it is come they shall not delay for one hour, nor shall they hasten it.

(KORAN.)

Gone are the marching armies and the victorious shout to the world of Islam in its lusty infancy. Yet it still spreads and grows. The aboriginal tribes of Africa incline to the simple creed of Islam, preached as it is by people of no recognized privilege, trammelled by no ritual, no restrictions of time and of place for prayer, no priest whose religious position gives him rights to interfere with the private life of the individual.

Anyone who has heard the Muezzin call, even unknowing the meaning of the Arabic words exhorting the people to pray, and watched their response in the kneeling and prostration towards the sacred city, cannot but be thrilled and touched in the imagination of what it all means and has meant.

Translated, the Muezzin's call says—

“Hie you to prayer ! Hie you to salvation !”

The faithful stand and whisper devoutly—

“Here am I at Thy call, oh Allah ! Here am I !”

In the morning, and leaning towards the setting sun at nightfall, whether working or playing, the devout Moslem, with no self-consciousness, performs his worship and prays.

When Islam's hordes of Arabs invaded North Africa they found the Christian Church divided by schisms and heresies, its members persecuting and fighting each other. The whole country was in a state of misery incidental to the chaos caused by the failing powers of the Roman

## Islam : The Arab Religion

empire. As is usual under a weakening conqueror, numerous chiefs and tribes had seized the opportunity to attain their independence by arms and battle, and chaos reigned with misery. The Arabs overlaid the land more than they held it by conquest. They passed through with the rapidity of easy conquest, taking the conquered into the fold of Islam, into which they came easily for the sake of the peace for which they longed. The Arabs conquered by battle, that is to say, and consolidated by the spiritual power of their new faith : ISLAM.

## Chapter 15

## Historical Sketch

**I**N the earliest days of which there is any historical information, there is evidence that North Africa was peopled by Caucasians in the west, and by the Berber or Libyan stock in the east.

One is apt to think of the peoples of Algeria and Tunisia as Arabs. This is not so, although these form a great part of the population. The Berbers are the indigenous people of North Africa, and, in history, whether they are called Numidians, Libyans, Khabyles, Tuarregs or other names, they are the same people and the predominating race.

Their origin is complicated and ancient. Their language and writing, which survive in some of the tribes to this day, is related to some of the dialects of Egypt. Their type is still distinct in spite of their invasion and conquest by the Arabian army of Islam and the devastating Arabian invasion of the thirteenth century, and, moreover, in spite of the fact that the Arabs were the only invaders who stayed and have stayed in the country until present times.

During the centuries of invasion and conquest by Romans, Arabs, Greeks, Turks and European Powers, the Berbers were used to retire in great numbers to their mountains and deserts, and so kept their independence and racial distinctions by evading contact with the aliens, only

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emerging from their seclusion if opportunity seemed to favour their hopes of winning their country back by rebellion.

Therefore one sees in the Khabyles, for example, a light-skinned people with hazel eyes, and here and there red almost blonde hair, and with individual language. There are evidences of very early Berber civilization, even before the Phœnicians began their invasion about 1200 B.C.

By 800 B.C. the Carthaginian empire and the Phœnicians were established. It was an immense empire, with Carthage, near the Tunis of to-day, for capital.

The Phœnicians did not exactly conquer the interior, but were content with a light rule, strengthened by alliances and acknowledgment of their suzerainty with and on the part of the indigenous chiefs and princes.

As their power waned in Egypt the Phœnicians concentrated on Carthage, and from the establishment of that town as their capital (820 B.C.) to the fall of the Empire (145 B.C.) they held North Africa from Morocco to Tunis. Greeks, Persians and other races had made isolated attempts at colonization, but made no real mark.

The Phœnicians used the Berbers as mercenaries, and allied chiefs fought on their side in numerous wars; but as these people then, as ever, were always waiting opportunity to revolt and gain their freedom, they were not dependable. The Punic language was then the common tongue of the country, and Phœnician culture was on the side of civilization.

In the long struggle, known as the Punic Wars, Rome succeeded in vanquishing the Phœnicians, and with the fall of Carthage (146 B.C.) begins the five centuries during which Rome was the sovereign power in North

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Africa, a period of varied penetrations and adventures to the Sahara and Tells of the continent. The height of Roman power in North Africa was from 50 B.C., when the whole of what we now call Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco was entirely under their sway, always remembering that the Berbers never submitted and were always ready to take any chance of throwing off the hated foreign yoke, which attitude prevented peace and security.

At the end of the third century A.D. Christianity was definitely established. It met with comparatively little favour with the Berbers, many of whom became Jews, but most of whom followed the pagan idolatrous religion of their fathers.

They hated the Romans for themselves. They were repelled at the fighting and discord among the Christian sects. The Christian churches of North Africa, with their several celebrated "fathers" (St. Augustus, St. Cyprian, Tertullian, and others), were so warlike over their enthusiasms and schisms as to destroy the influence of their church by the exhibition of hatreds, cruelties and fanaticism in the name of the gentle Christ.

So we see the Berbers joining the Vandals when (A.D. 415) these people invaded Roman North Africa.

By A.D. 430 the Vandals had supplanted the Romans.

These countries during the last two centuries of Roman occupation, during the Vandal invasion and expulsion a century later by the Byzantine armies, were in a state of misery indescribable. Armies surging like a tide backwards and forwards, Berbers rising here and there to be crushed and harried, the lands were laid waste from Carthage to Bone, from Constantine to Tebessa.

The granary of Rome, as the fertile plains of the Con-



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stantine, Tunisian and Algerian Tells had been called, was by now the waste of hurrying destroying armies.

The Vandals in their turn were destroyed by Byzantine armies. Justinian consolidated (more or less) North Africa from Egypt to Tangier by A.D. 531, just a century after the country had run blood in the Vandal conquest.

Again the countries were plunged into the struggle between the last conqueror and the new and their own endeavours to assert their own independence.

The Byzantines only lasted a century, they were displaced by the Arab Islamic invasion.

The Byzantines left their mark in the architecture of the country. The "horseshoe" arch (so familiar to every one through "Moorish" pictures, if not from travel) was then used for the first time in Africa. The dome followed later with Islam and the Arab—survival of symbols of the phallic forms of worship.

So we see the Berber ever independent in spirit ; but in reality under the heel of the latest of a sequence of conquerors at the beginning of the seventh century—the time when Mahommed was beginning a great movement called "Islam," by which, as the phœnix from its own ashes, was to rise the Berber, Arabized and Islamized, but still practically pure of race, as the proud and powerful Moor, whose empire was to dominate the Old World from the seventh century A.D. to the zenith in the thirteenth century. After which time it was to crumble away until at the beginning of the sixteenth century Barbary was a mere geographical term.

During their power internecine disputes had again torn these countries. Spanish and Portuguese made more or less successful efforts to get a footing, in which

# Through Algeria and Tunisia

the Spanish nearly succeeded, but were overthrown later by Barbarossa (sixteenth century).

About the middle of the eleventh century a devastating invasion of the Arabs laid Tunisia waste and put a temporary brake on the progress of the Moors.

The Marabuts (Al-Moravides), Berber tribes, who, after bloody conflicts, overcame the Arabs, made North Africa and Spain their own (1090). The end of the twelfth century saw the power and magnificence of the Moor at its height, after which it waned and waned to extinction.

Poetry, music, arts and crafts flourished under them. Beautiful mosques and palaces strewed their progress. Their government was wise and just for their period, their religious tolerance remarkable until roused by the fanaticism of the other creeds in their midst.

The great factor in the fall of the Moorish empire was the disintegration of the power of the Caliphate, the spiritual headquarters of Islam, as Rome and the Pope was to Christianity.

This decay culminated when the Mongol invasion of Asia drove the Caliphate (which had already moved to Damascus and thence to Bagdad) from Bagdad, after the sack of that city in the thirteenth century.

Although the title was and has ever since been invested in the Sultan of Turkey, the old power and prestige had departed never to return. All sorts of conflicting authorities and Caliphates established themselves, to the confusion and undoing of the great power of Islam.

In the thirteenth century three kingdoms had risen in North Africa from the ruins of the Moorish empire, corresponding roughly to our geographical terms Tunisia, 156

## Historical Sketch

Algeria and Morocco, with governments at Tunis, Tlemcine and Fez respectively. These had varying fortune under the attempts of Spain and Portugal to attain possession of North Africa.

Spain had virtually achieved the coast and a shallow belt of the interior at the middle of the sixteenth century, when the Turkish victory at El Djeraz (Algiers) snatched the longed-for prize from her wounded hand.

The long story of the waxing and waning of the Moors reached the point of their expulsion from Spain, when they began the last chapter of their history as the pirates who were the terror of the civilized world until 1830, when the French conquered Algiers.

In the early part of the sixteenth century the Moors invited one Barbarossa II, a pirate, the son of Barbarossa I, also a pirate and a Turk, to join them and expel the Christians—the Spanish and the Portuguese.

This was successfully done, but Barbarossa, growing personally ambitious and foreseeing how his quondam allies would dislike to acknowledge a Turk as their ruler, laid his conquest at the feet of Selim, then the Ottoman Emperor.

He was rewarded by the title of Beglerbeg of Algiers, and an army of Turks to uphold his authority. Algiers was declared part of the Turkish empire, and so began the influence of Turkey, which was to continue until the French conquest. From Barbarossa's time to the beginning of the nineteenth century the history of the littoral of North Africa is the history of the pirates—their defences and aggressions. Of the interior the history is of a continual state of wars and rebellions between and against the rival powers. The Turks

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systematically set these peoples against each other to prevent their combination against themselves.

Out of this chaos emerge stories of treaties with various Deys and Beys and European powers, and tales of subsidies paid by European powers to the Corsairs, and futile attempts to disperse these adventurers, who, like wasps, nested in Oran, Algiers, Bougie, Bone, La Calle and Tunis (and many other places).

From these strongholds they were used to swarm out, capture, pillage and destroy towns and fleets and private shipping.

So again, as ever, we see these countries torn and mangled by the quarrels of their own people and the quarrels of the aliens against each other, as well as against the inhabitants.

It is almost incomprehensible to realize that for three centuries the Corsairs terrorized and paralysed the Powers of Europe.

The facts remain.

France had suffered greatly from raids on her own coasts, and in her efforts at colonizing in Algeria from early days. The Deys and Beys had treated all Europeans with contempt.

Treaties had been made only to be broken.

It is possible that this was less from bad faith than from want of strength to enforce them upon their lawless heterogeneous subjects. For three centuries Algiers was the home of the rascaldom of the world!

Be this as it may, the French determined at last that it must end, although it was due to America that the Old World was made to see that this state of things could not continue.

## Historical Sketch

Taking as a pretext some special insolence of the Dey, they reduced Algiers to surrender, banished the Dey, and so began the establishment of French possession and authority in Algeria in 1830

The inhabitants, as soon as they realized that their country was about to become permanently under the rule of a Christian power, looked for, and found, a leader, and combining, fought the French. Ten years of battle and bloodshed led to a truce in 1841, when this leader, Abd-el-Kadir, was acknowledged by the French as Sultan of part of Algeria. However, this truce was soon broken; Abd-el-Kadir was defeated and deported.

He was a national hero, and the last leader who was followed by Berber and Arab in a common cause. He died in Damascus in 1883.

Next the French conquered the powerful Bey of Constantine. As their custom was, the Berbers retreated to the inaccessible mountains and deserts.

Constantine fell in 1848.

Then France, who up till then had waived aside the questions of other powers as to her intentions, openly declared Algeria French territory, and with a "hands off!" gesture to the world, continued her conquest and colonization of what is now a most valuable and prosperous dependency.

After various vicissitudes and changes in the form of government, and the quelling of the last rebellion of 1871, Algeria is, in essentials, settled and contented.

Criticism of the French occupation is an impertinence I will not indulge in. The difficulties were great. Let those who encountered them judge.

Tunisia is a French Protectorate, and the government



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is carried on through the Dey on the principles of the former government when it was independent. Thus a great deal of the trouble which arose in Algeria has been avoided.

French as Algeria and Tunisia are by possession and government, Italians, Maltese and Spaniards share the agricultural and natural sources of commerce and industry.

The French settlers, to a certain degree, mix with the Arabs and Berbers, who in the towns and country near the towns, are becoming Europeanized, talking French, and (alas !) modifying their dress, while the European inhabitants of the remoter districts show signs of becoming, to a small extent, Arabized.

The rebellions that have temporarily disturbed French authority and the under-current of discontent of to-day are the legacies of sudden conquest, hasty settlement and a failure to understand the feelings of the people. French enterprise and French money have enriched the country, which, at any rate, enjoys a peace and prosperity it has never before known.





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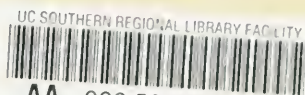
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